

**The mattering of African contemporary art:
Value and valuation from the studio to the collection**

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary research bridging geography and fine art ('geo-aesthetics') follows contemporary artwork journeys from the studio into the public domain to discover how notions of value shift as the artwork travels. It seeks transfigurative nodes and their catalysts to explore how art matters: firstly how it becomes matter in the studio, and then how it comes to matter beyond the studio door. Two case studies at key moments of revaluation, a buy-out and a buy-in, both reveal responses to uncertainty that stress different kinds of collectivity. The first case study follows artistic practice and process in four studios in a Johannesburg atelier to investigate intrinsic value and finds 'artistic thinking'. The second case study follows the assemblage of a private art collection managed from Cape Town, initially as an art fund, to investigate extrinsic valuation and finds 'structural thinking'. These different modalities in the production and consumption circuitry of the artworld have unexpected correlations including shared artists and three linking concepts, namely, uncertainty, mobility, and the web. These in turn inform three observations: nested capacity, derivative value, and art as a public good. Two key findings emerge: contemporary art is itself a vector of value that performs meaning as it moves; and public interest is a central characteristic from which other valuations flow. The research uses repeat interviews, site visits and visual methods, which are triangulated with artwork trajectories to surface linkages between space and imagination. It offers a performative theory of value that speaks to an expanded new materialism. Applying an ecological framework allows a final transfiguration for an artworld ecosystem that (re)values contemporary art as part of an undercommons.

Keywords: contemporary art, value, studio, collections, new materialism, performativity, commons

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The four artists at the core of the first case study, August House, let me into their creative processes at closing time as their atelier was put up for sale, and participated despite the difficult circumstances: Mbongeni Buthelezi, Daniel Stompie Selibe, Jacki McInnes and Gordon Froud. I am also very grateful to Power Mothetho Mazibuko and Gibson Mabutho Khumalo (who passed away in 2016), the building's caretakers, as well as Bié Venter, who transfigured this former textiles factory into an atelier. Herman Steyn, the life force of the Scheryn case study, let me in at opening time to observe an innovative art collection come to life and I thank him for this opportunity, as well as the collection manager Brett Scott for his assistance. All these participants were integral to the research findings: their creations led my lines of inquiry and their insights informed my own; needless to say any dropped stitches are mine alone. I thank all participants for their willingness to engage, their trust and their patience with an open-ended process.

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I piloted some early thoughts in this body of work at the WiSER symposium, *New Ethnographies of Johannesburg* (2014). I presented related work at a JIAS seminar in 2015, and at a joint PhD programme at KTH School of Architecture and Konstfack – University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Sweden, receiving helpful feedback. Two other presentation forums were particularly constructive: an artistic research symposium hosted by the Wits School of Arts, *ArtSearch*¹, and a symposium at the Belfast School of Art, *Being in Public: Outer Place/ Inner Space*².

The August House case study research informs a book of creative nonfiction, *August House is Dead, Long Live August House! The Story of a Johannesburg Atelier* (Gurney, 2017a) and occasional excerpts derive from that text, with thanks to Fourthwall Books. JIAS awarded me a Writing Fellowship for that book project, which helped me reflect upon and articulate the research in a different way. Chapter 4 partially draws upon a journal article first published in *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* (Gurney, 2016). Research findings from *The Art of Public Space* (Gurney, 2015) are cited in the thesis, with acknowledgement to Palgrave Macmillan, and occasional insights from a journal article first published in *Cities* (Gurney, 2018).

All images are my own visual research, unless credited otherwise (see p.59). The portraits of key August House interviewees are by Anthea Pokroy, commissioned for this project.

Finally, thanks to my family in particular my parents, Dot Gurney and John Gurney, who encouraged in me a curiosity about the world and to follow its trail.

¹ Gurney, K. 2017. *Tracked Changes: New Geographies, Old Histories*. [Paper, 9 March]. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, Wits School of Arts.

² Gurney, K. 2017. *Performing the Present*. [Keynote, 5 April]. Belfast School of Art: University of Ulster.

Chapter 1: Introduction



Fig. 1: Virus sculptures on the move from August House studio.

1.1. Overview

The image of ‘virus sculptures’ packed for studio relocation (Fig. 1) visually summarises my research, which followed the making of artworks within the studio environment and their onward journeys beyond the studio door. It sought en route nodes or moments of value shift and their catalysts, to reflect upon why art matters and how.³ My method borrowed from anthropology to “follow the things themselves” because meaning is inscribed in their forms, uses and trajectories (Appadurai, 1986: 5) and I applied this approach to contemporary artworks. In short, journeys of artworks led the way and this nomadism, broadly conceived, was integral to their meaning. The research found that contemporary art was itself a vector of value, performing and accruing meaning as it moved from one context to the next.⁴ The

³ See Figs. 4-7 for a visual demonstration of this process.

⁴ A vector is a quantity that has magnitude and direction. It can also mean an organism that transmits a pathogen; that is, a carrier.

thesis will expand in various ways upon this understanding, based on JL Austin's core idea of linguistic performatives (1962) that not only describe something but also do something ("I bet"; "I bequeath"). However, the key learning was less a case of finding vectors with which to validate contemporary art and rather of art itself being a vector that offers an intriguing barometer of the world around it.

The research employed grounded theory using situational analysis of empirical data from two case studies to make observations and generate linking concepts that informed findings. Broadly, the study falls within arts-based research – or "thinking in, through and with art" (Borgdorff, 2012: 44). Its theoretical framework (Chapter 3) speaks to an expanded new materialism (Coole, 2013). The research specifically engages Karen Barad's agential realism (2003), which is a performative take on the vitality of matter and its imbrication with human and non-human actors and, importantly, reads different perspectives through one another in a process she calls diffraction. It considers different notions of value and valuation as the artwork moves from the intrinsic world of the maker (the studio) to the extrinsic validation circuits of the buyer (the collection). Points of correlation between these different modalities broaden the dialogue to consider other kinds of circulations and make propositions possible about sustainability in an artworld ecosystem.



Fig. 2: August House facade in 2014.

More specifically, the first case study focused upon practice and process within a Johannesburg inner-city atelier, August House, to explore how meaning (value) was imbued in an artwork before it breached the studio door. This accrued through a series of transitions during the artwork's making. Most notably, a catalytic event disrupted linearity and made linkages between physical space and imagination more evident. The disruptive catalyst was the sale of the studio building through a shareholder *buyout* that was initiated at the start of the research period and took 18 months to finalise. This revaluation triggered an hiatus during which the artists had to relocate. How they responded to this prevailing uncertainty was key to research findings and demonstrated what I have termed 'artistic thinking' (Chapter 4).



Fig. 3: *Invest in the immaterial* – a neon artwork by Rosenclaire on the façade of The New Church museum. At launch in 2012, it was the first privately-owned contemporary art museum in South Africa. Its owner, Piet Viljoen, later joined Scheryn.

The second case study followed a more spectral geography of artworks migrating from various locations into a new private collection of African contemporary art, the Scheryn Art Collection, based in Cape Town. The research considered the validation networks of selection and dissemination involved in the acquisition process (valuation), which affect how artworks move beyond the threshold of the studio door.

This case study thus looked at systemic aspects of the artworld⁵, otherwise termed the infrastructures of art (Bakke & Peterson, 2017: 6). Disruption arrived in a different way: a new collector joined towards the end of the research period and added a substantial amount of artworks to the portfolio. This catalytic *buy-in* also triggered a revaluation process and highlighted the importance of intermediaries. Again, responses to uncertainty were key and this time demonstrated what I have termed ‘structural thinking’ (Chapter 5).

The cardboard box in Figure 1 was photographed at August House in Johannesburg – a former textiles factory turned atelier. The image depicts artworks, or viral sculptures, made by Gordon Froud, packed for relocation to his new studio. The August House case study observed the process of making new bodies of work from four different studios in the same building, and how these works carried meaning into the world (‘mpact’, the box states). The research was ‘fragile’, as the box also states, since it engaged aesthetic objects and their makers. The first case study was conducted amid difficult circumstances (‘closures’) as the studio building was put up for sale. During this interregnum, artists had to find new studios and the building itself a new identity. An initial set of linear trajectories thus became a triple study of migrations: the artworks, their makers, and the building’s new footing. The second case study of Scheryn extended the investigation to enable a much closer exploration of how art migrated into the world at large, through a process of formal accession procedures, and the modulations of meaning in this valuation process.

A relevant aside on terminology. ‘Fine art’ (used here interchangeably with ‘contemporary art’) is understood to incorporate a range of contemporary art disciplines from the concrete (such as painting, drawing, sculpture, printmaking, installation) to the ephemeral (performance art, interventions, new media). Whatever the medium and process, such artworks are infused by theoretical discourse, an historical lineage and conceptual rigour. This results in a reflexivity that arguably helps distinguish the fine art canon from a broader category of visual art. This reflexivity extends to making visible (evident) the conditions of its making. “What

⁵ Institutional theory advocates that an artwork has its status conferred by a larger context than its innate properties. The artworld was defined in a seminal 1964 essay on institutional art by George Dickie, later modified: “A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)” (Yanal, 1998: 2). The ‘artworld’ is used in this sense henceforth.

defines contemporary art today is its tendency to call attention to its own processes of mediation, to conspicuously announce the conditions and procedures of its social production and to highlight the participation of audiences and institutions in these processes” (Haiven, 2015: 52).

Related, the sociology of art has to take as its object not only the material production but also the symbolic production of the work – the production of the value of the work or belief in the value of the work, according to Pierre Bourdieu’s writings on art, literature and aesthetics (Bourdieu, 1993: 37). “It therefore has to consider as contributing to production not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artist, writer, etc.) but also the producers of the meaning and value of the work – critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such ... In short, it is a question of understanding works of art as a *manifestation* of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning, are concentrated” (Bourdieu, 1993: 37, original emphasis). Consequently, Bourdieu also understood art as an arena where relationships might be forged that reinforce power, privilege and wealth.

This complex terrain is explored through two emblematic cases which respectively offer particular insights into the material and symbolic production of contemporary art. At the time of the research study, August House was a highly regarded but under-represented locus of artistic practice and was researched while its tenants disbanded; the Scheryn Art Collection was a groundbreaking initiative that was researched during its formative stage. Thus an intertwining of endings and beginnings, or what becomes understood in the research as a web of neverendings, is inherent from the start. But there is a third tier of investigation in an expansive form of new materialism to consider, what Diana Coole terms the ‘meso’ level (2013: 464). This sits alongside the micro tier of existential details of the embodied quotidian (August House) and the macro tier of the intermediaries that Coole calls vital switching points for directing, distributing and manipulating matter (Scheryn). This meso level, Coole says, is the planetary eco-/bio-/geo-system where nature succumbs to or eludes social control (2013: 464). Each tier finds expression in the respective analyses of Chapter 4 (the studio), Chapter 5 (the collection) and Chapter 6 (the synthesis).

Notions of value comprise a weighted research topic, represented in Figure 1 by reinforced box corners. On the other hand, there is also a sense of humour: notice the artwork string escaping from the top left-hand corner, as if it had a mischievous mind of its own. That playful attitude infused the investigation, which looked out for such moments of surprise and possibility. As with any artistic enterprise, the study itself was subject to unpredictability: it was never clear where that opaque box was going to lead. It originates from the corner of Lantern and Moore streets in Wadeville, its logo states, but has the potential to travel anywhere. The research likewise began anchored in a Johannesburg studio and first expanded outwards to engage multiple locales before consolidating again into the anchoring form of a collection. Surprise and possibility emerged in various ways – through unexpected fates, unforeseen shifts, tensions between stasis and flux, ends that became beginnings, artworks that re-appeared and disappeared, and shared key concepts.

Following these trails of artwork journeys offered local examples of global resonance on how to rethink artistic value. Taken together, the case studies formed a speculative map – speculative in the sense of engaging imagination but also in the double-edged sense of considering worth. The central idea was to canvas both the producer and consumer of contemporary art about *their* respective assessments of value and valuation, and then bring these two different modalities into correspondence to help inform an alternative proposition. The latter was built in turn upon earlier theoretical work around the commons that will be detailed later on.

The box in Figure 1 recalls another much more famous box – an artwork entitled *Brillo Box* (1964) that was created from a found object. That artwork by Andy Warhol elevated apparently ordinary cardboard packaging into a work of art and hence cued fundamental questions about what art is and why it matters. The transfiguration of the packaging was akin to Marcel Duchamp's urinal *Fountain* (1917), an everyday object that had artistic status conferred upon it through conceptual intent and recontextualisation. The artist merely added his signature to this found object and presented it as an artwork. *Brillo Box*, however, was not a packaging box; it was made of plywood and created to resemble a packaging box in every respect, and ordinary packaging boxes did not consequently transfigure into works of art. Arthur Danto (1981), well known for his writings about the nature of art, explained the process of

transfiguration of the commonplace object into art.⁶ He pointed out that no material differences need distinguish the artwork from the real thing, creating an urgent philosophical problem to define art (1981: 208). Danto views the Brillo boxes as signalling the start of taking seriously a philosophy of art. But importantly, he also points out this transfiguration by the artist of a commonplace object transformed nothing in the artworld itself. “It only brings to consciousness the structures of art which, to be sure, required a certain historical development before that metaphor was possible ... As a work of art, the *Brillo Box* does more than insist that it is a *Brillo Box* under surprising metaphoric attributes. It does what works of art have always done – externalizing a way of viewing the world, expressing the interior of a cultural period, offering itself as a mirror to catch the conscience of our kings” (Danto, 1981: 208). The important issue Danto raises of structural change to transform the artworld itself is attended to in the synthesis of Chapter 6.

The key contribution of this research shares in the aspirations of Michael Hutter and David Throsby (2008) who seek a new dialogue about value and valuation of culture amid warnings that financial considerations, particularly in the policy arena, will tend to crowd out all other aspects of value. They too bring disciplinary viewpoints together, “opening up a dialogue between scholars about the processes of valuation that they use, and exploring differences and identifying common ground between the various viewpoints” (2008: front matter). My own interdisciplinary work arises from similar concerns, set out below. It extends the dialogue with empirical studies from a southern perspective, rooted in Johannesburg and Cape Town as the epicentres of South Africa’s artworld and central to the African continent. That said, the research deliberately positions itself as part of a global conversation, offering findings at once local and potentially common to other comparable cities of flux.

1.2. Background

Some aspects of this thesis were seeded in a research project I conducted for the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, tracking a trilogy of ephemeral, performative art interventions that explored public space in Johannesburg.

⁶ Danto’s application of the term ‘transfiguration’ is how I apprehend it here; that is, when an object undergoes a shift in perceived value through conceptual intent or recontextualisation and becomes something else.

That project culminated in a research output which achieved certain things and left other things undone, signaling fertile areas for subsequent work. The subject matter, *New Imaginaries*, was a Goethe-Institut project trilogy manifested by independent curators in Johannesburg at different intervals during 2012. *New Imaginaries* explored public space through walking or journeys and ambulatory thinking (*Shoe Shop*); via gaming, new technologies and subversive play (*A Maze.Interact*); and finally, with performance art traversing the city's transport lines (*Spines*). I devised a workable research methodology to track these temporary artistic interventions and reflect upon them. This included following the artwork trail, a method this thesis similarly deploys and which Chapter 2 contextualises. The *New Imaginaries* research also seeded some key exploratory tracks which the thesis takes forward.

Briefly, these tracks concern three things. Firstly, the thesis deliberately privileges artistic process in its method and concerns. The research thus begins immersed in the studio or 'imagination's chamber' (Peppiatt & Bellony-Rewald, 1982) to overcome gatekeeping, curatorial or otherwise. This emphasis on starting with the studio and working outwards carries significance in itself. It counters a focus within commodity studies on product rather than process, as Estelle Barrett (2007: 160) has pointed out; she says this focus mystifies artistic products as commodities rather than providing an elucidation of creative arts practices as alternative modes of understanding the world and revealing new knowledge. Specificity of artistic practice also makes possible certain ways of knowing.⁷ This view is underscored by the relational aesthetics of Nicolas Bourriaud (2002:7) who says the very first question has to do with material form, and advocates getting as close as possible to the artist's work and situation as a way to reveal principles that structure their thoughts.⁸ In the research findings, I call these principles artistic thinking.

Secondly, this thesis deepened an exploration on how artists cope with uncertainty (1.5.), which formed a key strand of thought in that earlier work where a chapter was

⁷ Mick Wilson (2017). ArtSearch symposium. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand. Author's notes.

⁸ Bourriaud defines art as a general term describing a set of objects presented as part of a narrative known as *art history* (1). "This narrative draws up the critical genealogy and discusses the issues raised by these objects, by way of three subsets: *painting, sculpture, architecture*. (2) Nowadays, the word 'art' seems to be no more than a semantic leftover of this narrative, whose more accurate definition would read as follows: Art is an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects" (Bourriaud, 2002: 107).

dedicated to examples that could speak out to other fields or disciplines. Finally, the thesis also takes forward an emergent agenda, *Towards an art of the commons* (Gurney, 2015). This agenda proposed public space as a dynamic reality of contested common space, constantly re-negotiated and performed in daily acts that Paul Chatterton (2010) terms ‘commoning’. He extends the commons beyond the physical to complex social and political ecologies, not always subjugated or in response to practices of capital accumulation but “full of productive moments of resistance that create new vocabularies, solidarities, social and spatial practices and relations and repertoires” (2010: 626). My earlier work suggested art manifested in such spaces made possible an art of the commons. The thread lay in a related discussion of ecosystem services. Without going into the detail of the transposition here, a non-pecuniary reconfiguration was proposed that substituted interest or income in the standard model with cultural interest (or public interest) instead. This transposition was structured on the back of an ecosystems modelling trope: the standard model derives from an underlying investment fund structure of capital and income, now re-imagined. That proposition was conceived as ‘punk theory’ that crossed disciplinary silos, in turn inspired by artists who created drags from one medium or domain to another. In these surprising juxtapositions, they helped re-imagine reality. This thesis takes the thought experiment further by employing actual case studies in an artworld ecosystem to re-imagine a stream of benefits.

Perhaps most importantly, this emergent agenda was formulated as a deliberate riposte to the increased instrumentalisation of art in public policy whereby its contribution is primarily validated with economic metrics. This is an Anglo-Saxon trend that South Africa has embraced in its own public policy, which advocates a broadly economic validation for the arts, culture and heritage sector by conceiving of it as an industry instead. The core idea in the *Mzansi Golden Economy* strategy is that the arts should contribute to the economy through job creation, foreign exchange and Gross Domestic Product growth. This approach is at time of writing under consideration as part of a formal review process regarding the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (Department of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology, 1996) but has already been implemented for the past few years.⁹ Such policy dovetails

⁹ Former South African Arts Minister Paul Mashatile told delegates at a 2011 consultative conference to reposition the sector: “From now on, the arts, culture and heritage sector will take its rightful place:

with amplified financialisation of the arts, which is dealt with more explicitly in chapters to come. Given this broader context, the thesis aspires to help articulate an alternative value script by following the transfigurative trajectories of actual artworks and where these vectors might lead.

The Introduction now turns in more detail to the research problem, its rationale, and a conceptual framework for mapping this terrain.

1.3. Research problem

This research set out to investigate how art matters – how it becomes matter in the world of the studio and how it comes to matter in the more public world beyond the studio door. The two key research questions were: what is the measure (value) of contemporary art? And as corollary: what in turn does contemporary art take the measure of?

The method of investigation was to follow artwork journeys, looking for nodal points or moments where ideas about value shifted and to consider their catalysts. An example might be the successful casting of a sculpture from a fragile medium like clay into more resilient bronze or it may be an artwork shattering on the studio floor. For the collector, it might be the awarding of a significant artworld prize to an artist whose work is part of the collection, or a scandal negatively affecting artistic reputation. A visual illustration of this kind of linking process of nodal moments, crossing both case studies, is illustrated below (Figs. 4-7) through the work of Zimbabwean artist, Kudzanai Chiurai. Chiurai is a well-known artist whose work offers a sociopolitical critique, most commonly in painting or installation. His work travels internationally to art fairs and biennials, he is represented by one of South Africa's top commercial galleries, and was recently included in Cape Town's newly opened iconic museum, Zeitz MOCAA (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa). For a time, Chiurai rented a live-work studio space at August House. I myself took over this studio space in 2012. It included three wall stencils Chiurai had left behind. The one

at the core of the national effort to build a socially inclusive society and to contribute to economic growth and job creation" (author's notes). The 2012 strategic report of the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) officially adopted these objectives for implementation. For more on this policy, see Gurney (2017b).

in the kitchen, depicting a supermarket trolley full of guns, went on to have a series of second lives (Chapter 5). The stencils disappeared when they were painted over after the building changed hands.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Figures 4-7: A visual demonstration tracking nodes of value transfiguration observed between 2013 and 2017: Kudzanai Chiurai's stencil in August House studio in Johannesburg (Fig. 4) juxtaposed with the author's artwork, *Labour of Love*; the trolley cipher reappears in a 2016 Armory Show installation in New York (Fig. 5); is then exhibited in 2017 at the Goodman Gallery in Cape Town (Fig. 6); and most recently at the art museum Zeitz MOCAA in Cape Town (Fig. 7) – a print aptly titled *While the harvest rots: possessing worlds of Kudzanai Chiurai's Art* (2016).

The study then brought together these different modalities of taking art's measure (the studio and the collection) to see how points of correlation might help (re)value contemporary art as part of a commons. In short, the artwork was understood as a vector of value that performs its meaning as it moves, and public interest is a central characteristic from which other valuations flow. As subsequent chapters will clarify,

the research found that contemporary art draws meaning from its nomadism and this nomadism takes surprising form: not only physical trajectories but conceptual journeys into implied spaces. Artworks also moved by proxy, through the lives of their makers and comparable works, and thus became a locus of indexical value. As corollary, the research found that contemporary art is a societal barometer that prefigures, through its transfigurations, potential forms to come.

1.4. Rationale

The research problem relates to disappearance at different scales and temporalities, invoking in turn tension between the visible and invisible ('hosting' and 'ghosting' in Chapter 2). My own artistic practice, which is not a subject of this research, does however bear some relevance to the thesis origins as my practice engages with different kinds of disappearances and makes restorative gestures. This has ranged from commemorating people forcibly 'disappeared' by politically repressive regimes, sculpting a ritualistic instrument back to life from archival documentation and making a sound artwork from its performance, creating collaborative public art from a stormwater tunnel and other so-called offspaces, and visualising statistics for threatened life forms. This research study began with a similar impulse – the imminent disappearance of an art collective of a kind, and the idea to bear witness before the artists disbanded.

At Coole's micro level, then, the research rationale was triggered by disappearance on a site-specific scale: the imminent disbanding of an atelier. For almost a decade, August House hosted a cross-section of fine art practitioners who significantly contributed towards the cultural fabric of both Johannesburg and the country through their independent practices. Then, in late 2013, August House was put up for sale and its tenants had to relocate. An era came to an end. As a media article at the time described the atelier, "its worth and renown are measured by those who have inhabited it" (Zvomuya & Jason, 2013: 6). My research began with the desire and unique opportunity to index something of this building's distinctive inner life before it ended, by tracking selected artworks in the making. What is interesting to note up front is that the new owner, who eventually came on board after a protracted process of prior potential deals fell through, did not convert the building into residential units as previous suitors intended. Rather, he saw value in August House as an atelier and

decided to re-inhabit it with artistic tenants. A second version of August House was born after the research period concluded. This storyline will be picked up later. Due to the building's sale, the research study became a triple concern – not only to track the artworks in their journeys but also the artists in their relocations, and the building's resolved fate. They all fashioned themselves new and often surprising futures. There was no neatly clipped end to these entangled journeys but a series of transfigurations instead.

The building's sale triggered a second research trajectory by bringing to attention structural factors operating outside the studio door that impacted upon life within. The insular studio environment alone, where the research began, no longer seemed sufficient as a case study to explore notions of value. The studio environment was highly imbricated with broader structural realities. The follow-on case study thus investigated how contemporary art moved beyond the studio door, via the acquisition processes of Scheryn Art Collection, and its curatorship strategies.

This segues into Coole's macro level of an expanded new materialism, or vital switching points for directing, distributing and manipulating matter (2013: 464). My curiosity at this level was prompted by the global financial crisis 2007-08 when mainstream stores of value, such as pension funds and mortgage securities, were eroded. Along with a loss of faith in the durability of these mainstream securities, alternative assets gained a new allure. This disparity was most strikingly demonstrated on 15 September 2008 when Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy and on the very same day a *Golden Calf* created by one of Britain's top contemporary artists, Damien Hirst, fetched £9.2 million at auction. The sale was part of a larger auction of new Hirst artworks that raised £111 million, unusually bypassing galleries as the conventional sales channel for new work. This apparent decoupling of the financial markets from the valuation of contemporary fine art has since become less extreme, and contested. The average price and confidence indicator for Hirst also dropped significantly after this sale (Petterson, 2014: 78). Nonetheless, the attraction of art as a so-called alternative asset has increased. Art's lack of correlation to other asset classes is proffered as one of its attractions for investors or collectors, with art outperforming many traditional asset classes in the crisis recovery. This is evident from Figure 8, which shows the Citadel Art Price Index (Capi) – a mapping of major South African art sales at auction – outperforming all other asset classes during this

time of crisis (from 2007 into 2010 on the graph). In Figure 8, the JSE All Share is the major South African stock market index. CPI is a measure of inflation.

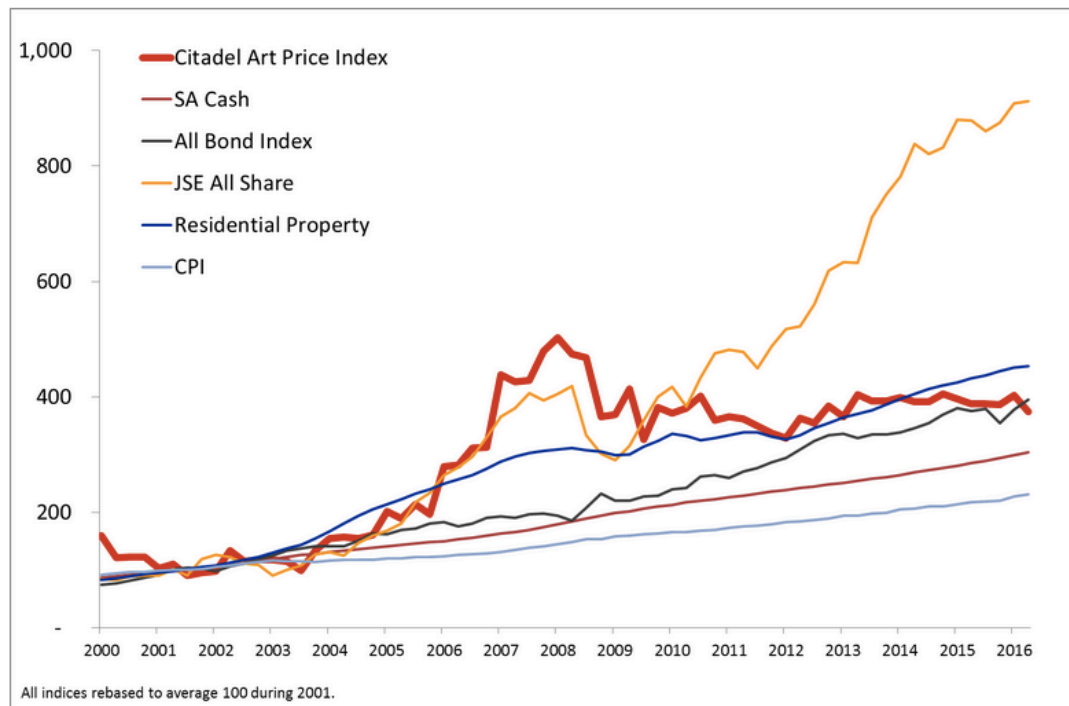


Fig. 8: Capi, August 2016. Source: Citadel Wealth Management.
Available: <https://www.citadel.co.za/about/art-price-index-capi/latest-index/> [2017, July 28].

Exploring this basic anomaly was part of the primary research motivation regarding notions of value and how it related to issues of uncertainty. Stores of value, in the broader sense of things that retain worth, are being recalibrated in a post-crisis world. This extends from reassessing the premises of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of national wealth (Stiglitz & Fitoussi, 2010; Boyle, 2001) to thinking about a new global commons (Harvey, 2012: 67-88; Tonkiss, 2013: 176-7) where shared resources are differently valued and managed. Paradoxically, however, the arts sector is increasingly under pressure in public policy to validate itself with an economic rationale, as flagged above. How can artistic value be framed differently, without resorting to such instrumental notions, and what kind of language might best articulate this? The challenge is linked to the moment we find ourselves in: the financial crisis ushered a profound disconnect between the price of things and their actual value (Haiven, 2015: 40). “There is some fundamental and terrifying chasm between, on the one hand, the quantity and qualities of money in a globalised age, and, on the other, all those things that today, increasingly, money seems to unduly influence: the value of food, the value of art, the value of human life ... Money seems

to measure or represent everything today, or, more accurately, mismeasure and misrepresent everything” (Haiven, 2015: 40).

The findings thus engage ecological thinking at Coole’s meso level, taking its cue from a re-imagined heuristic of ecosystem services to address the sustainability of an artworld ecosystem and differently render its benefits (‘services’) – why art matters and what art itself may take the measure of as it moves. It does so by creating theoretical drags between different ways of apprehending value and valuation and bringing them into dialogue. These worlds – described by key research participants as the nest (studio) and the tree (collection) – are not often in deliberate conversation yet are inextricably linked in what grey literature increasingly calls the artworld ecosystem. The findings take heed by design of the singular dynamics around the artist’s intent as well as the realpolitik of institutions and the networks through which contemporary art ultimately moves – or stays put, as the case may be. It finds these potentially antagonistic worlds have points of correlation (1.5.) that offer key concepts. These in turn inform the synthesis in a deeper systemic dialogue that helps generate an alternative value proposition.

In an evidence review on the value of arts and culture, Sir Peter Bazalgette, the chair of Arts Council England, said we would articulate, in time, a new language of cultural value that would help to understand the essential contribution the arts make to our lives (Mowlah et al., 2014: 1). The key concepts, set out in the next section, are an attempt to help fashion that language by experimenting with metaphor. The locus of metaphor is in concepts not words (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 244); it is based on cross-domain correlations rather than similarities, and grounded in everyday experience. What is more, metaphor can give meaning to form, since speaking correlates to time and time to space (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 126). “Artworks provide new ways of structuring our experience ... Works of art provide new experiential gestalts and, therefore, new coherences” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 235). Indeed: artistic thinking can infuse structural thinking and vice versa to re-imagine material realities. Along with fraught entanglements there is potential for mutual reinforcement and Chapter 7’s Conclusion returns to this domain.

1.5. Conceptual framework

This section summarises three key concepts, which are interlinked and play across both case studies: uncertainty, mobility, and the web. These concepts are variously employed in the analysis to come, and they each relate in turn to the key synthesis insights of Chapter 6 – nested capacity, deriving value, and contemporary art as a public good. The three concepts were generated in the final synthesis of the research process, which drew together the two case studies through points of correspondence. They are, however, set out in this Introduction to provide conceptual aides for navigating the empirical data.

a) Uncertainty

The defining trope that runs through the thesis is uncertainty and responses to it are key to findings – specifically, the responses of collectivity and nested capacity (6.1.). Uncertainty was ushered into the research with the sale of the August House building, which cast a prevailing sense of precarity around future working conditions for the building’s tenants (and living arrangements for some of them). This placed a greater emphasis in the research upon the linkages between physical space and imagination, which Chapter 4 details. Likewise, buyers of contemporary art also face a dominant structural problem of fundamental uncertainty, according to Beckert & Rössel (2013: 180) – what passed as quality was difficult to determine and they could hardly estimate how a specific piece of art would perform. Beckert and Rössel suggest the value of a work originates in an inter-subjective assessment, in particular of reputation by experts in the art field. This was reflected in the research through the important role of intermediaries – collectors, advisors, galleries, critics, curators, and so on, in the second case study of Scheryn. Intermediaries acted as a kind of sieve, for better or worse, that filtered out which works became visible or invisible to a broader public.

The two case studies offered different understandings of the role of uncertainty and risk in the trajectories of artworks from the studio into the public domain. Anna Dempster, who wrote a book on risk and uncertainty in the artworld, devised a schematic of approaches (Table 1). Importantly, she made a clear differentiation: risk could be measured and therefore managed, while uncertainty was unknowable. For the artist, she said risk was ‘critical’ and often implicit in practices and processes; it could also be conceptualised positively. At most it should be managed but not

minimised or avoided. “Artists and creatives often define themselves as risk-takers, rule-breakers, boundary-destroyers” (Dempster, 2014: 35). The financial world, on the other hand, was granted a ‘balanced’ approach where risks included downside and upside and should be managed.

Perspective	Focus of Discourse	Aims and Propositions	Example of evidence base and empirical context
Negative			
Risks stem from unwanted developments (manmade or natural).	Risk is associated with hazards, accidents and disasters.	Risks should be minimised as much as possible and ideally eradicated completely (although this may not be possible in all cases).	Found across science and social science theories. Applied areas largely including the natural sciences, technology and engineering. Often involve large-scale, global concerns (such as the environment).
Balanced			
Risks include both negative (downside) outcomes as well as positive (upside) aspects. They should be differentiated from uncertainty and can be actively managed.	Taking risks is associated with entrepreneurial activity, innovation, change and social development.	Risks must be balanced with returns. While 'downside risk' should be minimised, risk should not necessarily be eradicated since it is linked to returns, 'upside risk' and opportunity creation.	Theories in economics and sociology. Found in applied fields including finance, business and management.
Critical			
Risk is a critical component of the creativity process. Much risk-taking can be conceptualised in a positive way.	Risk is associated with challenging the norm and status quo, enabling innovation, creativity and artistic production.	Risk-taking should be learned and attempted. At most it should be managed but risks should not be avoided or minimised. In certain settings, risk-taking should be maximised and encouraged.	Few theories to date. Implicit in practices in the arts and creative industries (including the art world).

Table 1: Attitudes to risk (Dempster, 2014: 40).

The unknowability of uncertainty is also viewed positively by Helga Nowotny, who says its cunning lets in the unexpected: “It makes room for the new, even if the new is often made from clever and unexpected recombinations of already existing elements. Poised on the threshold between the present and an unknowable future, it invites us to join the dance” (Nowotny, 2016: 36). While Nowotny’s dance is appealing in principle and Dempster’s table is useful up to a point, they both preclude the kind of uncertainty that creates systemic risk, putting people at a disadvantage in everyday relations. By way of illustration, Figure 9, below, depicts workmen on a Doornfontein factory rooftop, an image taken from the window of an August House studio. It makes evident the daily risks assumed while ‘making do’. Chapter 6 thinks of ways to

address systemic risk and applies these to its propositions. This is an important step because the symbolic order is linked to the functioning of the economic order, according to Bourdieu (1998: 82), and silences or complicity can help maintain it. Bourdieu uses job insecurity by way of example, part of a mode of domination that destructures existence, “deprived among other things of its temporal structures, and the ensuing deterioration of the whole relationship to the world, time and space ... By making the whole future uncertain, it prevents all rational anticipation and, in particular, the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions” (Bourdieu, 1998: 82). This blow to the capacity to project into the future, as Bourdieu puts it, was evident in the precarity the sale of August House ushered in. At first, productive horizon lines collapsed before the artists went on to figure out their strategic responses. But Bourdieu also sees struggle as possible, starting with an abandonment of individualistic views and bringing conditions of production and reproduction into the economic system as well as what is needed for the system itself to function (Bourdieu, 1998: 86-7).



Fig. 9: A view of everyday risk-taking, photographed from August House.

To recap then: uncertainty was triggered in both case studies by disruption – the buy-out by a property developer of the August House shareholders (‘August House Properties’), and the buy-in of a collector into the Scheryn collection’s ownership structure (‘Scheryn Art Collection Trust’). These events are covered in more detail in the empirical chapters to follow. A common hinge is the nexus between fine art, property and finance or capital flows. This in turn invites a critique on the complex interrelationships between artists, studios and capital or real estate that often takes the form of gentrification arguments. In the ensuing analysis, I will point out moments where this nexus occurs and its relevance for responsibilities and complicities in the complex web of relations that comprise the artworld. However, to clarify, the thesis research was not designed to unpack land valorisation issues per se. For one thing, the end result of the property buy-out was in fact to turn the building back into an atelier – and not into residential units. This was motivated by the buyer’s own interest in contemporary art and his own collection. The actual outcome of the case study thus offered a surprising end that pointed to new possibilities the analyses will unpack further. Rather, the thesis was designed to go back to first principles as it were and explore how the art object gains significance in the first place. It then follows subsequent validation trails to see how the artwork moves in circuits of validation and how its meaning shifts. The hypothesis was that an act of attentive following of those transfigurations would be more generative to consider ideas of artistic value, in its broadest sense of why and how art matters, than collapsing the discussion into gentrification debates. As Joy Mboya points out regarding urban shifts in Nairobi, it is a case of broad processes of sociospatial realignment instead, “a consequence of emergent business seeking infrastructure for operations” (2017: 59), and this is often the case in global South spaces of flux. The main interest regarding the building’s sale was the surfacing of relations between space and imagination: how the artists coped with the resulting uncertainty in their practice, the strategies they employed to turn this condition to new ends and how artworks might embody this contextualised knowledge or way of thinking. Importantly, the thesis then expands outwards to attend to structural issues and the strategies employed in the uncertainties of valuing art, and how these in turn might help re-imagine spatial realities. This process helps consider how both artistic and structural thinking could co-build a more resilient artworld ecosystem. The underlying challenge was to better conceptualise and articulate the mattering of African contemporary art. That kind of exploration arguably precedes gentrification dynamics and could best be understood as informing

that issue rather than unravelling it. In short, both artistic thinking and structural thinking have productive capacities and working principles that have much more to do with southern urbanism than ‘elsewheres’ and they need to be read from the ground up.

Finally, uncertainty can be regarded as a liminal condition – a kind of middle space or cusp and this concept permeates the thesis in different ways. Charles Seeger, a pioneer in musicology, said in 1977 that to understand his paper on the unitary field of music, you had to begin in the middle and “work outward in all directions” (quoted by Daniel Cavicchi, 2013: 53). Another way of expressing this sentiment of middle space might be to quote personal correspondence with a painter friend advising on the stretching of canvases: “Small canvases are easy to stretch, but big ones are bastards. Always rotate as you secure and make sure you start in the middle of each side and work gradually outwards. This is to make sure the warp and the woof are stretched evenly” (personal communication, 2013). A similar spirit was at the heart of this research: the warp was conceived as the longitudinal thread in a roll of cloth (the building); the woof was the transverse (the artists and their migrating work).

Middle space finds expression with the transversal force Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari give it: “The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things [designates] a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (2005: 25). This happens in various ways: the research begins with the artists, joining them midstream in their studios, and works its way out. It takes clues from the middle space of the building – the lifts, passages, basement – and celebrates the disjunctive middle between the building’s exterior and interior, bland on the outside and otherworldly within. It then traverses the middle space of a private art collection, a hinge between the studio and public world. This transversal action is also a way of building up new knowledge – conceived by Édouard Glissant as archipelagic rather than continental (Lauro, 2014: 16).

Middle space is in short an artistic way of thinking. As the poet Lesego Rampolokeng (2015) put it at a public talk: “I operate from the inside out”. These notions were emulated by building interrelated insights as archipelagic knowledge rather than imposing a top-down view. The related improvisation of working from the inside out

is to enter a world continuously “on the boil” (Ingold, 2008: 14), to follow the ways of the world as they unfold rather than connecting up, in reverse, a series of points already traversed (Ingold, 2008: 17).

Working from the inside out also reflects Homi Bhabha’s definition of cultural knowledge as an “integrated, open, expanding code” (1994: 54). Bhabha’s writings have been influential in cultural politics, engaging colonialism, race and identity. His notion of ‘third space’ is particularly relevant – a space that allows for other positions to emerge while acknowledging an incommensurability in that process. As the synthesis in Chapter 6 will demonstrate, this thesis also brings different positions into play without attempting to make them commensurable and thus reaches for a conceptual middle space. ‘Thirdspace’ also has a spatial dimension, as Edward Soja has set out. In this interpretation, drawing upon Henri Lefebvre, Firstspace is perceived space while Secondspace is conceived space and the two often operate in a dualism; Thirdspace is lived space and calls for a different way of thinking about human geographies (Soja, 1999: 267). This thirding, as he calls it, shifts from a temporal to a more spatial mode, from a linear sequencing to configurative simultaneities and synchronies (1999: 269). This creates ‘Other’ spaces, “radically open and openly radicalized, that are simultaneously material-and-metaphorical, real-and-imagined, concretely grounded in spatial practices yet also represented in literary and aesthetic imagery, imaginative recombinations, epistemological insight, and so much more” (Soja, 1999: 272).

b) Mobility

This thesis is animated by a second key concept of mobility, which generates a corresponding insight around deriving value, or the right to follow (6.2.). Crucially, it finds that the nomadism of the artwork, or its ability to move, is integral to its value – what Daniel Buren calls an eternal nomadism (2012: 90). The research finds this nomadism is not only literal movement of the artwork from place to place. As curator and artist Thembinkosi Goniwe (2016, added emphasis) told a public audience, artworks are about ideas more than anything else and ask us to get out of our selves:

“An artwork is to begin a journey that is unpredictable and *to imply other spaces*, multiple trajectories for people to travel.”¹⁰

Mobility is just as spatial or geographical and just as central to the human experience of the world as place, writes Tim Cresswell in *On the Move* (2006: 3). He sets up three relational moments for socially produced motion, or movement that becomes mobility: first, mobility as a brute fact and empirical reality; second, mobility conveyed through representational strategies; and third, mobility as embodied or a way of being in the world. Stasis and mobility, or fixity and flow, are the subjects of deep knowledges that inform any number of ways of seeing the world (Cresswell, 2006: 22). A tension between what stays put and what travels was likewise integral to both case studies. It also extended the kind of mobility the artworks could represent – for instance, artworks that had mobility through the proxy lives of other comparable artworks, and even through their makers. The tracked artworks in Chapter 5 demonstrate this ability.



Fig. 10: ‘Let me out!’ Lift doors in Ellis House, a new art hub in Doornfontein that followed in the August House wake.

¹⁰ Comments drawn from *Making art across disciplines and geographic boundaries*. 23 February 2016. Johannesburg: Market Theatre Laboratory. Thembinkosi Goniwe, James Ngcobo, Jyoti Mistry and Gregory Maqoma moderated by Mary Corrigan. Author’s notes.

Cresswell's mobility as brute fact and empirical reality is reflected in the geographical ambit of artwork trajectories that travel from August House, and in the journeys of tracked artworks from various locales into the Scheryn collection. The August House studio relocations are demonstrations of such mobility too. Artworks that physically moved into exhibitions or corporate premises also had the potential to 'move' viewers through affective impact and ideas transference – Cresswell's mobility through representational strategies. The third and final relational moment is mobility as embodied or a way of being in the world. On the one hand, acquired artworks can be taken as an indicator of the capacity to 'move' financially, socially or geographically and inhabit the world in a certain way. But embodied mobility could also be understood as an ethics or the nomadic values that Rosi Braidotti describes in her book *Transpositions* (2006: 145): working against dualism to allow for a series of productive transversal connections. Braidotti says transversal connections require middle grounds, or modes of relation, which in turn demand an ethics of interrelations (Braidotti, 2006: 138). Sustainable nomadic ethics requires transversal discursive practices, "extensive rhizomatic alliances: a concrete practice of cross-disciplinary discussions needs to be adopted, with transposable notions moving about ... We need to think the spaces in-between and their interconnections, without stopping at any one centralised concept: a nomadic style of thinking which is open to encounters with others – other systems of thought or thinking environment" (2006: 138-9).

Painter Virginia MacKenny articulated an embodied mobility when she told a public audience that being an artist was not only about the things she made, but "how I am in the world, what my conversations are, what I do, how I think about where I am in the world" (MacKenny, 2016). She added that painting was the imprint of value onto cloth, that revealed itself over time; it was an ongoing conversation between the personal and the outside world and making connections between things. Speaking about a specific painting, which engaged the Twin Towers disaster of 9/11 in the United States, MacKenny said her painting of a body in suspension mirrored a broader condition: "We are in a world of extraordinary uncertainty – we have to learn to be flexible. What do we do between two points of suspension?". This links us back to the first key concept of uncertainty, and the middle space, or toggling between, that it represents.

Mobility is closely linked to performativity, a concept that in the linguistic field is rooted to JL Austin who, in a series of 1955 lectures, described performative utterances – that is, words that do something rather than merely say something (Austin, 1962). An example of ‘a performative’ would be promises or bets or bequeaths, which under the right circumstances create the conditions of their own truth. Austin’s performatives not only describe but co-institute a reality and this understanding is integral to the thesis Conclusion. Theorists like Judith Butler have engaged with comparable notions of performativity with respect to gender – in particular the idea that gender is a performance without ontological status, and what is performed always operates in relation to what cannot be performed or said (Gregory et al., 2009: 526-7).

My own understanding of performativity is drawn from the field of contemporary art. Visual art practices since the 1960s have opened themselves up to a theatricality that suggests processes of art production and reception as performative, with meaning enacted through interpretive engagements rather than a static object with prescribed signification (Jones & Stephenson, 1999: 12). “The notion of the performative highlights the open-endedness of interpretation, which must thus be understood as a process rather than an act with a final goal ... in the complex web of relations among artists, patrons, collectors, and both specialized and non-specialized viewers” (1999: 12). Moreover, such visual art practices tap into the shifting nature of the city’s multiple modalities and a broader ‘performative turn’, acknowledged in theory and by human geography specifically in the 1990s (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2010). Performativity is ephemeral, often difficult to capture financially or otherwise, and this also matters in a current moment that increasingly puts art, and the academy, to work. Performance art often uses a combination of space, time and the body to convey its meaning. This definition of performativity, a perspective from the artworld, informed the research analysis. It also became relevant for the related outputs, in terms of performing the content (see 2.8.).

Performativity is likewise a recurrent thread in the second case study, Scheryn, and this manifested in different ways. Performance art was an evident thematic in the collection itself, thus implicating space, time and the body. Striking examples of this kind of work included Benin photographer Leonce Agbodjélou’s images of the Egungun Masquerades. This series comprised photographic documentation of

fabulous costumes that formed part of performative ritual. Less literal was the acquired work of South African Robin Rhode, whose performance art often acts out three-dimensional scenarios in two-dimensional drawings using chalk, props and play. At another level, the collection performed an idea of value through its assemblage of artworks into a portfolio, parts of which it would stage at public exhibitions that positively affected their provenance. Performativity also carried in the performance fee for the collection's management company, which was rewarded in line with how the artworks 'perform'. The analysis of the Scheryn study takes this key concept further by deploying 'performative metrology' (Chapter 3) that addresses the social aspects of (art) markets. As Arjun Appadurai (2013) suggests later in this thesis, markets are constantly dynamically produced, with risk and uncertainty integral properties. Appadurai has more recently employed notions of performativity to interrogate the 2007-08 financial crisis, viewing derivatives as performatives, in Austin's sense of the word, which created a house of broken promises that collapsed in upon itself. All these different notions of performativity inform the synthesis of Chapter 6, which ultimately puts forward a performative idea of value.

Nigel Thrift, a leading geographer, suggests revived cultural geography should take an expressively formed embodiment into its thinking, along with recognising the richness of the world that takes investments of affective energy in objects seriously, and producing a different ethos of engagement (Thrift, 2004: 121, 125). This engagement involves new kinds of surfacings, Thrift says, which are released by making implicit and powerful connections. Embodiment shows up in the many acts of performance, providing a capacity to know the world from an awkward perspective that cannot easily be kept in play in other ways (Thrift, 2004: 123). More specifically, the human consists of different body parts or counterparts, where the non-human counts as an architecture of action, "a set of circulating ethologies, architectures of unlike things ... moving thought-ways, ways of doing/ thinking world ... the work of doing relation". Thrift concludes that thinking about space through movement can have an impact on how spaces function (Thrift, 2004: 127). This kind of engagement is at the heart of the research method.

c) The web

A linear research inquiry that set out to follow the journeys of things was fruitfully disrupted by revaluation events into observing a web of synchronous interconnects instead – what Ingold calls meshwork (following Lefebvre, 2008: 19), and my painter friend earlier termed the warp and woof. The significance of this disruption for method is dealt with in the research design in Chapter 2. The conceptual significance is that the nature of the artworld is more like a web, an ecology investigated through the case studies of the nest (studio) and the tree (collection). This third and final concept of the web, specifically in the form of an ecosystem, relates in turn to the key insight generated regarding contemporary art as a public good (6.3.). The web also becomes evident in a more metaphorical way in the ensuing analysis, demonstrating interconnects between artworks, people and spaces over time, and various examples are highlighted in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

My deployment of the web takes inspiration from the natural sciences to reconsider relations – in particular using the heuristic of ecosystem services. The artworld is increasingly described as an ecosystem in grey literature but the term is seldom unpacked. This section firstly sets out what an ecosystem means and later, in Chapter 6, adapts the logic of ecosystem service's core Cascade model to the artworld. This kind of interdisciplinary crossover can be generative and the analysis engages ecological thinking. Ecological, multicomponent and multi-level models are needed for questions of cultural value because of the complex nature of the effects of cultural engagement between individual, community and context (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 157). This transposition makes it possible in the findings to think more clearly about art as a public good and consider the implications.

Scientifically, an ecosystem consists of biotic (organisms) and abiotic elements with strong reciprocal coupling while the environment of an ecosystem consists of elements having unidirectional influence, strongly affecting the ecosystem's elements but hardly being affected by them (Meron, 2015: 35). Biotic elements are ordered according to their position in a food chain of producers and consumers; while some belonged to two or more trophic levels that all had different organisational levels. Finally, decomposers close the food chain by using dead organisms as their food source. A key comparative point for this research on the artworld is that ecosystems

generally involve *multiple space and time scales* (Meron, 2015: 36-7, added emphasis). Also, transitions of state may appear as sudden irreversible changes or regime shifts when the slow dynamics of an ecosystem are induced by environmental elements (Meron, 2015: 37-8). Related definitions of sustainability diverge and in the scientific context the term is understood as fulfilling other objectives, such as environmental and social, beyond economic longevity.¹¹ The thesis also shares this desire, to articulate value beyond price.

Ecosystems relate to a discourse of the commons, or what Hardt & Negri (2004) prefer to call ‘the common’. Effectively, the commons could be understood as resources that belong to everybody and to nobody; for the same reason, the commons is contested. The concept does not only refer to geographically bounded goods in the physical world – like a forest – but also those that are socially reproduced (Chatterton, 2010: 626). That idea is reflected in notions such as urban commoning (Chatterton, 2010), the common as produced (Hardt & Negri, 2004: xv), the politics of the common (Amin, 2011), and the undercommons as self-organised ensembles “where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 26). The common good has even been defined as a habit of mind that might lead to mutualistic actions, or an active sense of belonging that would generate effort to contribute to the whole (Golley, 2003: 412). However defined, commons are conceived in associated literature to deliver services as a stream of benefits to the public. The natural sciences use ecosystem modelling to put a financial lens on these benefits in order to value them (ecosystem services). This also deals with a pervasive social problem called the “tragedy of the commons” (Garrett Hardin, 1968) where free-riders can exploit common resources for their own private gain.

Thinking of society as an ecosystem dates back to the Chicago School of human ecology in the 1920s and 1930s; that said, new forms of ecological thinking have come to the fore (Rigney, 2001: 36). “The ecological metaphor offers a view of human societies as living entities nested within a still larger system of living things, the world biosphere ... The image of society as a living system suggests that we are

¹¹ Notably, the international development agenda acknowledged culture for the first time in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals framework.

an organic part of something much larger than ourselves, which has a life and being all its own” (Rigney, 2001: 39-40). This thesis considers the artworld as an ecosystem or web of interdependent parts. By way of illustration, Figure 11 depicts an urban garden on the rooftop of August House, which was used by tenants as a commons. The plants then travelled between studios: they had to move from the roof during the research period due to leakage concerns. Landlord Bié Venter took them into her August House loft, and later they moved with her after the building’s sale to her new Kensington home. Artist Diane Victor on the fourth floor adopted some stragglers. Victor also described the artists’ migrations from August House in ecological terms, as seeds that germinated to start up other art hubs. The origin story of the August House rooftop garden meanwhile connected to nearby Joubert Park, where Venter was involved in an inner-city greening project that helped conceive the urban garden idea. These ecological metaphors were crowned by the evocative description of August House as a nest by one of its caretakers; the artists in turn were the birds that migrated when the nest was “messed” by the sale (Khumalo, personal interview, 2014). Separately, the second case study comprising an art collection was conceived by one of its advisors as a tree. The collection’s acquisitions were structured accordingly, with their interrelationships or branches an important consideration of value. Taken together, then, the two case studies of nest and tree represented a larger artworld ecosystem and framing device for the thesis at large.



Fig. 11: The urban garden, a common space on August House rooftop.

A schematic of a contemporary artworld ecosystem is depicted below, devised by Petterson (2014), with new developments in the global art market and new types of tastemakers and influencers highlighted. It is clear from Table 2 how this research corresponds, with its case studies of producer and consumer and a range of intermediaries inbetween. This static model of an ecosystem, however, does not show the flow of interrelationships. In addition, the ecosystem analogy is problematised in the relevant literatures on the basis that it naturalises an existing order that potentially limits critical analysis and prohibits its disruption (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2012: 5). A similar critique was offered by artist Mick Wilson (2017, author's notes), at a Johannesburg art conference, who cautioned against naturalising the world of artistic practice. Wilson said art practice should be problematised because [fine] art was a production and confection of European colonial modernity; for the very same reasons, the making of art could itself be a process of inquiry, he added.¹² Table 2 exhibits this flaw of naturalising the power imbalances and structural dysfunctions within this ecosystem schematic but still offers a helpful way to apprehend the multiplicity of different actors.

Producer	Agents	Media	Cultural intermediaries	Market intermeds	Enablers & support services	Enablers & support services	Consumers
Artists	Galleries/artist-run spaces	Art magazines & critics	Art curators	Auctions	Support services (shipping, insurance, legal)	Valuation, data, research, collection management	Collectors (private, corporate, museums)
	Online galleries, artist portals	Social media, blogs	Modern art museums	Art fairs	Online inventory management	Price databases, indices	Investors, art funds
			Not-for-profit art centres	Advisors			Wealth management
				Art dealers			
				Online auctions/art fairs			

Table 2: New art market ecosystem (Petterson, 2014: 80).

To move this forward, the Cascade model of ecosystem services is a foundational schematic in the natural sciences (Fig. 12). “By exploring the elements that make up this cascade, and the mechanisms that link them together, the argument is that

¹² ArtSearch symposium. March 2017. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

ecosystem service researchers can systematically connect environmental processes and entities occurring in nature with wider benefits – physical, cognitive, social – to people” (Fish, Church & Winter, 2016: 210). Ecosystem services are defined as “the interactions (i.e. processes) of the ecosystem that produce a change in human well-being, while ecosystem components or goods ... are only proxies in the assessment of such changes” (La Notte et al., 2017: 392). In this conception, ecosystem services are therefore not individual components or goods; a service is a process whereas a benefit is a component (2017: 398). The Cascade model depicted is fairly self-explanatory and introduces a dynamism into the understanding of an ecosystem. Later, I adapt this Cascade model for the artworld (Fig. 72) to offer a more pointed proposition.

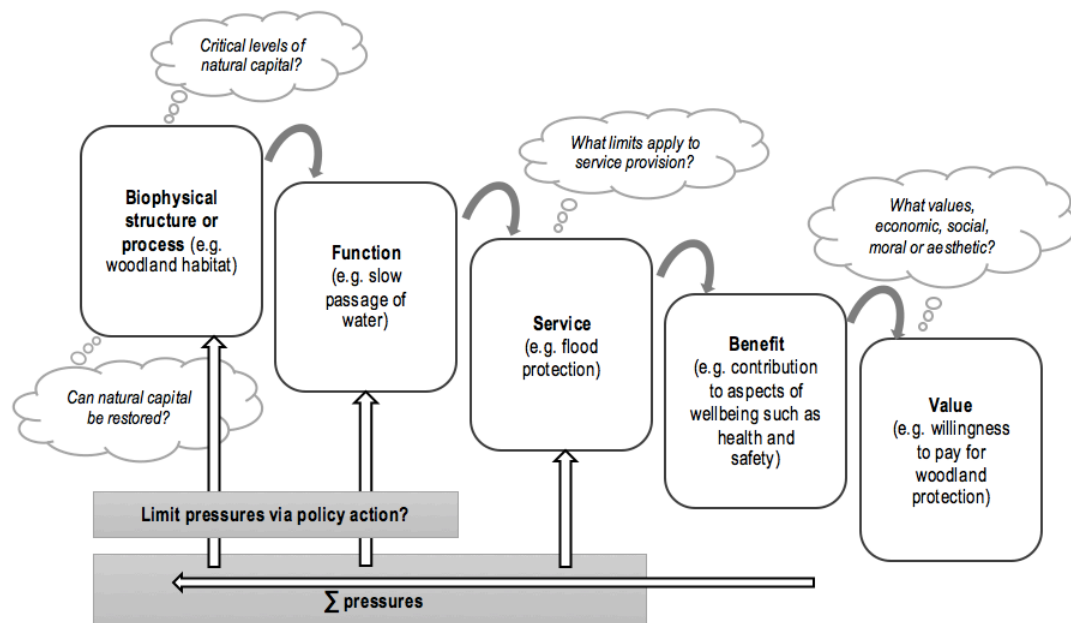


Fig. 12: Cascade model for ecosystem services. Source: Initially proposed in Haines-Young & Potschin (2010) and modified to separate benefits and values in De Groot et al. (2010).

The ecosystem heuristic is a web that will be employed in the analysis to follow, in particular conceiving of contemporary art as a public good. It is a form of assemblage, in the way AbdouMaliq Simone views such constellations – places like markets, ports, municipal administrations, bus terminals, offshore plants, back-office processing zones, large-scale low-income and middle-class housing developments, and universities, “domains where politics, culture, economy and technique are potentially folded in many different ways and as sites of possibility ... it is also the willingness to be moved, to be enfolded into something where your own sense of what life is and what your interests are have to be assembled elsewhere” (Simone,

2011: 364). Simone also offers a view about how a market operates, and with reference to one of South-east Asia's largest markets points out that urban life in landscapes of vast inequality is also something "rigged together" and the pieces may not fit or easily coincide (2011: 356). What gets done and accomplished in the market, he adds, is not completely the purview of a capitalist logic or the domination of its ruling class; "its efficacy requires less imposition of a given form or practice than an incessant process of give and take" (Simone, 2011: 362). This research likewise finds surprising gives, takes and rigged-together solutions where all the pieces do not necessarily fit dominant logics. The nested capacity we will encounter as solution to precarity is an example of this kind of assemblage.

The thesis aims in its propositions for a more resilient artworld ecosystem. Indeed, according to Swilling and Annecke, future social transformations will be determined and constrained by sustainability challenges and social scientists need to learn about the dynamics of natural systems from their colleagues (2011: 16). This segues into complexity thinking – where multi-agent actors are a given, and uncertainty turns out to be a strength (Heylighen, Cilliers & Gershenson, 2007). Complexity theory has even been adopted by some cultural geographers to offer a metaphor for understanding space and society (Gregory et al., 2009: 105-6), following the cultural turn's emphasis upon difference, contingency and context.

Perhaps what the idea of a web really affords is context. Ellen Pearlstein, speaking on the assessment of significance and decision-making in object conservation, told a public audience at Iziko South African National Gallery, that materiality was very much influenced by context. She drew upon Danto to elaborate: "The persuasion of knowing the context of a colour immediately begins to awaken us to the fact that we have associations of significance and value to the works of different individuals at different points of time depending also upon the context in which they're created" (Pearlstein, 2016). Different modes of presentation altered the meaning and significance of objects, she added: "They are full of stories and intangible assets that we don't know." Following artwork journeys is one way to unfold them.

1.6. Thesis structure

Chapter 1 has set out an introductory framework and key concepts as navigational aides. Chapter 2 reflects upon methodology while making the position of the research

clear. Chapter 3 is a literature review of the general theoretical framework and how the thesis relates. Chapter 4 details the case study of the studio (August House) and Chapter 5 details the case study of the collection (Scheryn) in two parts – its curation and its underlying technical structure. Chapter 6 is a synthesis that brings the work together, employing the key concepts to make observations that infuse findings. The analysis reads each case study *through* the other, in Barad’s idea of diffraction and acknowledgement of complexity – that things are not reducible to the sum of their parts. Chapter 7 is a brief conclusion that sums up the research and its particular contribution.

Chapter 2: Research design



Fig. 13: Another box, another journey: research archive acquired at PhD registration date.

My research method borrowed from anthropology to “follow the things themselves” (Appadurai, 1986: 5); Appadurai suggests that tracing the career of an object through different regimes of value shows how knowledge about it becomes more contradictory and fragmented the further it travels. My study followed artwork trajectories from the studio outwards to assemble, following Igor Kopytoff (1986), a cultural biography of things. Closely imbricated with those things were human beings living complex and interconnected lives. This approach allowed for ‘the thing’ (in an expanded definition) to lead the way in a journey informed by human subjects, a journey that was disrupted by events and circumscribed by structural realities in a complex web of forces. This method is unpacked in detail below, and located in Chapter 3 within a broader theoretical framework of an expanded new materialism. It employed grounded theory, particularly situational analysis, to reflect upon empirical data and generate new insights.

2.1. Timeline and data collection

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2014												
2015												
2016												
2017												

	August House core interviews and fieldwork
	Scheryn core interviews and fieldwork
	Synthesis and writing

Table 3: Research timeline

The fieldwork for this research took approximately three years in total. The research period for August House started in late 2013 and formally concluded after 18 months, in mid-2015, drawing a line when the building was finally sold. This period was informally extended for follow-up research, in particular regarding artworks that continued to travel. New artistic hubs created by the August House diaspora in the wake of the building's sale also continued to develop and advance research findings. The building itself found new traction when the new owner brought other artists back to repopulate it as an atelier. The start of this second artistic life for August House is where my fieldwork formally ended.

The first case study included several extended interviews with each of the four selected artists in their studios, more or less at monthly intervals. This timing allowed for sufficient progress in the artwork series that I was following, and I was also conscious not to over-burden the artists or be too disruptive of usual working routine. Other tenants in the building were also interviewed to inform the research – the caretakers, the landlord, residents who were not artists, as well as interested parties such as the new buyers. Another prime source of information was the studio environment itself, which was captured through visual documentation, notes and observation. I gave the building artistic identity and considered the offerings from its basement, passageways and rooftop as vital clues that revealed their own narratives. External sites were visited to get a sense of the production process for all four

participant artists, including a plastics factory, exhibitions, a foundry, and an installation site for a public artwork. This composite data was then triangulated with the physical trajectories of artwork journeys to make observations and findings. Four new bodies of artwork were tracked – one from each selected artist, whose studio locations more or less corresponded with the four floors of the building.

The four artists were selected for their long-standing connections to the building. They were all early tenants when August House was converted from a former textiles factory into an atelier in 2006. They consequently had a deep understanding of how the building operated and how it related to its immediate environment and had an overview of its reconfigurations. They were also selected for their range of artistic disciplines (painting, sound/ performance, mixed media and sculpture respectively), their demographic diversity, and their willingness and availability to participate in an open-ended project over an extended period of time. Ultimately, one newly resolved body of work was successfully tracked for each; other shortlisted works fell by the wayside as the research progressed. The participant artists were: Mbongeni Buthelezi (a series of paintings titled *Nobuhle, Beauty Queen*), Daniel Stompie Selibe (a new collaboration and sound performance titled *Miles Rehearsal*), Jacki McInnes (a sculpture titled *Wife's Lot*) and Gordon Froud (a series of sculptural installations titled *Cone Virus*). They created these specific works toward varied ends including private collections (Buthelezi), public performances (Selibe), a solo exhibition at a commercial gallery (McInnes), and public art (Froud).

The duration of the research period for the second case study, Scheryn, was likewise approximately 18 months. It began, once formal agreement had been reached, in September 2015 and formally concluded at the end of December 2016. The research focused upon the co-founder Herman Steyn as key interlocutor, with repeat interviews roughly every six weeks. This interval was more practical to accommodate work schedules including travel, and to reflect progress in the collection itself. A few months into the research, a collection manager was appointed, Brett Scott, who joined the formal interviews. Other fund associates and industry experts informed the research further, including through interviews. Another key data collection point was regular internal Scheryn meetings that were held to discuss the collection and decide upon new artworks to purchase. These occasions, about every six to eight weeks, provided important background data. External sites were also visited including

exhibitions, an auction floor, and art fairs. As with August House, a major event drew the research period to a close – this time the disruptor was a buy-in rather than a buy-out. A new member, Piet Viljoen, decided to join the Scheryn setup and to add a major portion of his significant personal art collection to the Scheryn portfolio.¹³ This buy-in offered a neat bookend to the research period and the research study as a whole. The side passages/ offspace equivalent of the August House atelier in this case study were social media channels, which offered up an ongoing stream of information about artists and their work. As with August House, all of this composite data was then triangulated with the artwork trajectories of several works selected from the Scheryn Art Collection to make observations and findings.

The choice of which Scheryn artworks to follow changed over time. At first, I favoured a geographical spread of artists to represent various countries on the African continent given the collection's mandate to acquire works of African contemporary art with global appeal, from the continent and diaspora. "The Scheryn Art Collection provides collectors with the opportunity to contribute to the growth of African art while benefitting from both aesthetic rewards and long term capital appreciation."¹⁴ But once the collection had built up further and the choice of artworks expanded, I switched this selection to artists who had a discernible link to the first case study, August House. This was to make evident interconnects in the artworld that were becoming more apparent with time, and to bring the worlds of the case studies into direct dialogue. As it happened, this selection was less important than imagined at the outset. The artworks understandably did not move far beyond the corporate or private premises of collection members, nor relocate with any frequency while the collection was in this startup phase. One work travelled publicly and internationally on exhibition during the research period. But the collection was in its early formative stages so its public face had yet to emerge. Tracking the artworks was a methodological device that in this case study fortuitously served to reveal less literal mobilities and structural processes instead. What is more, while some artworks 'sat still', their significance was recursively affected by the trajectories of comparable works and the lives of their makers. The artwork thus became a repository of derivative value, so to speak, and took the measure of less visible dynamics. This idea

¹³ At time of writing, the exact terms of this transaction were being finalised. In the end, 286 artworks joined from Viljoen's collection to create a joint Scheryn portfolio valued at R55 million in December 2017. See Chapter 5 on the Scheryn case study for more.

¹⁴ www.scheryn.com, Scheryn website, accessed 2016.

is fully engaged in Chapter 5 to demonstrate this mobility by proxy, and Chapter 6 deals with the implications.

The formal fieldwork process, which relied on iterative interviews, had advantages and drawbacks. Insight was gained at regular intervals into internal processes and dynamics that were otherwise opaque – whether inside the studio or assembling a private collection. These spaces are otherwise privileged; witnessing process, via the creation of artworks and the infrastructures of the artworld, was instructive. It offered an opportunity to observe how artistic value and valuation were approached from different positionalities. That said, the formality of the research process also meant these interactions were only a partial picture taken in sequential moments of arrested time. Research subjects were understandably embroiled in the realities of their work; they were not thinking between interviews about providing ongoing information for external research objectives, and these objectives in any event were necessarily recalibrated as the study progressed. Useful exchange mostly happened during face-to-face settings and targeted follow-ups. My research was consequently a truncated view of ongoing processes and its findings qualified to this same degree. That picture nonetheless affords an interesting and valuable composite regarding often opaque spaces from which some insights can be drawn. In addition, both case studies were observed at a unique and distinctive point in time. In the case of the atelier, a highly regarded independent artists' space was coming to an end and would be replaced by something different; in the case of the collection, a new and original African contemporary art initiative was just starting up in a pre-public process of innovation.

In summary, insight was accumulated in nine complementary ways:

- Formal interviews including repeat interviewees to follow changes over time;
- Site visits to get insight into artistic process and assemblage of collection;
- Meetings both formal and informal;
- Observation and field notes;
- Drawing upon quantitative analyses (e.g. GCRO Quality of life survey; Capi);
- Textual analysis of art discourse;
- Digital tools including social media;
- Fieldwork journal;
- Visual research / visual notes.

2.2. Location

The August House research was conducted primarily in Johannesburg and the Scheryn Art Collection research was conducted primarily in Cape Town, South Africa. The artworks themselves travelled multiple trajectories, from greater Johannesburg to the Western Cape, as well as global cities including London, Milan, Paris and Beijing. They were exhibited at locations including a residential garden, a seaside clifftop, an inner-city rooftop, a countryside sculpture park, commercial galleries, an auction house, international art fairs and more.

2.3. Field of research

This interdisciplinary research in cultural geography trails the journeys of contemporary artworks and their shifting value and is broadly situated between geography and fine art, or what could be dubbed geo-aesthetics. Art has an expanding field of theory and practice and geography an expanding field of operations (Hawkins, 2013: 52), thereby creating three intersections: artists' changing orientation towards site; a phenomenological critique of the body; and the materialities and practices of making. The keywords – 'site', 'body', 'materialities', 'practices' – are usually articulated as intrinsically geographic, and are applied in this intersection to the artworld, states Hawkins. Their synthesis affirms the place and value of the study and practice of art within key disciplinary concerns (Hawkins, 2013: 52). Further, cultural geography is generally informed by ethnography and textual analysis, as well as understanding the particular to illuminate the general (Shurmer-Smith, 2002). This study employs various ethnographic techniques and borrows from anthropology to illuminate specific case studies as emblematic, offering new empirical data from relatively under-examined sites. It is a qualitative study that uses situational analysis as conducted in the social sciences and humanities in order to construct a form of grounded theory. Grounded theory, which was initially developed in the late 1960s, constructs theory through data gathering and analysis, and is elaborated upon below (see 2.5.). The thesis makes observations from its empirical work, which lead to findings through bridging concepts (1.5.). The synthesis generates alternative propositions for apprehending value and valuation of contemporary art.

My fieldwork aspired to the approach of anthropologist Filip De Boeck, who is well known for his research in African cities in particular in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He describes his research as urban acupuncture – selecting spaces relevant to the creation of publics, like a building, field, burial site or crossroads, and inserting an analytical needle. “By writing an ethnography of that place, from that nerve centre, the nerves radiate out and connect with other places, from spot to spot, to try tell the story of that horizontal plane. By [inserting] the needle, you also of course go into the vertical and into the deeper layers in the ‘longue durée’ of the city and you touch all the histories that continue to very much be there – such as land, who owns it, who opens it up for the city, constellations of power, and so on” (De Boeck, interview, 2015).

My own acupuncture began with the vertical plane of a five-storey building (including the basement) and extended outwards from there, connecting to different localities through the horizontal journeys of the artworks. Further, in his latest work, De Boeck collaborated closely with visual artist Sammy Baloji through an interaction between anthropology and the arts to get at what they call vitalities of everyday life in the Congo. Baloji’s photographic oeuvre engages how different times converge into ‘the now’ in a process of collecting and recollecting urban pasts.¹⁵ Specifically, the duo used two topographical starting points for their joint explorations – the mountain and the hole, or how the precolonial mountain became a postcolonial hole and a master trope to express living in the city. They describe the hole as a suturing point, following Jacques Lacan, that can metaphorically elide our life but also offer an opening, “how to see the possibility in the impossible, the one in the zero” (De Boeck, 2018: author’s notes). The kind of intersection De Boeck and Baloji are engaging counters a general reluctance for anthropological studies to incorporate image-making into fieldwork beyond the formal photographic document (Ramey, 2011: 271). Indeed, each discipline has its own particularities and history yet there is room for generative interplay, to consider contemporary art as more than an object of research and rather a way to think radically and to be exposed to the unforeseen and unexpected (Schneider & Wright, 2006: 25); to consider the open and processual

¹⁵ Comments drawn from Filip De Boeck’s presentation, *Vitalities of everyday life in Congo*, at the University of Cape Town, African Centre for Cities: International Urban Conference, 2 February 2018.

character of the artwork over anthropology's aversion to ambiguity (Schneider & Wright, 2006: 20).¹⁶

The decision to position my contemporary art research project within a geography department rather than fine art enabled another way of thinking about geographies of art and related mobilities. A key point of interest in exploring ideas around the value of contemporary art was art's capacity to communicate matters outside its own self-referential world, in an interdisciplinary conversation that could articulate findings in accessible ways with potential applications for other fields. For this reason, it was helpful to locate the project as a relative departmental outlier. It also meant the research itself could benefit from other perspectives. Artworks can potentially enable interdisciplinary dialogue when they travel into the world at large, and indeed this research topic at heart concerns contemporary art's capacity for the same. Arts-based research aims to act as a kind of cultural transponder. In a world of growing complexity, translation between silos of expertise is increasingly important, according to Gillian Tett, an anthropologist turned journalist. She points out how silo thinking was part of the reason so few people spotted the problems building in complex credit – it encouraged fragmentation and internal tribalism (Tett, 2010). However, this departmental location also meant premises were not shared and shorthand (disparaged as “International Art English”¹⁷) was less available. More pragmatically, multivalent research outputs did not have a comfortable home as they might in a creative discipline. That was part of the experimental challenge, and in line with what Henk Borgdorff calls “border violations” in artistic research (2012: 46). Perhaps over time such border violations will create an expanded field of possibility for the articulation of interdisciplinary research. This cues a discussion of what kind of work this field of research entails.

2.4. Nature of research

Howard Becker (2008: xvi) wrote in *Art Worlds* about a way of looking at the arts to create problems for investigation; what Becker terms working ideas, drawn from the

¹⁶ See 3.4. for more on this disciplinary crossover. The journal *Critical Arts* has also recently published a number of special issues that look into the so-called ethnographic turn in contemporary art to explore how artists engage with ethnographic and anthropological perspectives in their work.

¹⁷ https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/international_art_english

‘sensitising concepts’ of Herbert Blumer. Becker’s three key working ideas with regards to art are its collectivity, that artworks result from a process, and that comparison is central to investigation (Becker, 2008: xii).¹⁸ Becker’s approach of going back and forth between theory and data is also instructive: “The connection between theory and research, put simply and abstractly, is that theories raise questions, suggest things to look at, point to what we don’t yet know, and research answers questions but also makes us aware of things we hadn’t thought of, which in turn suggest theoretical possibilities” (Becker, 2008: xi). This research takes heed of Becker’s working ideas and extends this approach by adding practice into the mix, as a form of data. An implication of Becker’s *Art Worlds* is that works of art have no stable existence but are continually changing: “Art’s unstable status becomes especially apparent when something moves, changes categorization, or resists the defining parameters of ‘art’” (Bakke & Peterson, 2017: 2). Likewise, the constant recalibrations of artworks as they migrated from the studio comprised the ambit of my research and the artwork’s value found to be contingent upon this nomadism.

The problems for investigation in this thesis were characterised by arts-based research, or artistic research in its broader terminology. It was applied first of all to the August House case study, which set a template for the Scheryn case study to follow. This section addresses what this area of research means, its methodologies, ethical implications, and my own subjectivity which also has a bearing. The technical definition of arts-based research is perhaps the best place to begin. Commonly used terms under this broader umbrella include artistic research, practice-led research and research-oriented art. Each has a different emphasis, and in different countries the same term may mean something else. The most general term is *arts-based research*, which best fits this thesis. A short definition is that arts-based research employs a form of the arts (in this case, fine art) to elicit, convey, and/ or analyse information as a part of inquiry (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 15). This inquiry extends beyond textual description and visuals as illustrations. An important distinction and related clarification: my own approach within arts-based research was not *practice-led*, whereby the researcher who is also an art practitioner uses their own artistic work as research material and part of the inquiry. Having said that, my own experience as a

¹⁸ My own sensitising concepts, set out in Chapter 1, were uncertainty, mobility and the web. These in turn have key implications set out in Chapter 6: nested capacity, derivative value, and contemporary art as a public good.

practitioner surely infuses some of the observations I can make. However, that impact is difficult to quantify. Rather, the approach was *practice-based*. This means it engaged the artistic output or practice of others instead. This practice-based approach is part of a spectrum of possibilities for arts-based research. It is an emergent field without clear-cut rules. The subject matter requires an open-ended approach that sets out a clear intention but is flexible and open to contingency.

The preconditions of the broader field of artistic research are still being defined but the debate has turned to specificity of artistic research practice and the conditions of its possibility rather than its validity (Beckstette, Holert & Tischer, 2011: 6).

Borgdorff, a key voice on artistic research, gives two distinguishing characteristics. Firstly, art practice is not just the motivating factor and subject matter but central to the research process itself – the creative process is part of the pathway through which new insights, understandings and products come into being (Borgdorff, 2012: 46). Secondly, contemporary art practice constitutes the relevant context for the research alongside the academic forum, so in addition to new insights it contributes new forms (artworks/ installations/ other artistic practices) meaningful in the world of art (Borgdorff, 2012: 46).

Henk Slager has written extensively on knowledge production, artistic thinking and medium specificity. He describes artistic research as a self-reflexive movement continually producing novel connections, accelerations and mutations in temporary, flexible and open systems that enable the production of various metamorphoses in the research process (Slager, 2010: 228). Slager says artistic research could be described as a methodice, “a strong belief in a methodology founded by operational strategies which cannot be legitimized beforehand. Artistic research is a form of mapping, it constantly produces novel lines of thought and novel lines of research. Indeed, those are the essential characteristics”. Most fundamentally perhaps, artistic research and arts-based research privilege practice and process. Hence, this research fieldwork began immersed in the studio and followed artwork trajectories from there.

2.5. Method

I set off on this research to follow the things themselves which is also described, when extended to analysis and theory, as “thinking through things” (Henare, Holbraad

& Wastell, 2007). Following things was a methodological device; it allows things to dictate the terms of their own analysis that might generate a multiplicity of theories (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell, 2007: 7). An artwork is of course a very particular type of ‘thing’ – it could be a concept or a performance, for instance - and as such it offers both an extension and critique of this approach. The method of following and thinking through things thus allows “new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects” (Brown, 2001: 7).

While August House fieldwork followed the assemblage of new artworks in a building that was closing down, Scheryn traced the acquisition of artworks for a private collection that was starting up. In both cases, artworks led the way to structure the research terrain. In both cases, as Chapters 4 and 5 make clear, disruptions of that linear methodology made deeper processes evident in a web of interconnections. This disruption brought to the fore the related topic of uncertainty and how this prevailing condition led to strategies for resilient solutions and nested capacity. Nonetheless, ‘the thing’ led the way and its trail unfolded a series of clues for making observations and findings. I will now unpack this approach and specify my own orientation within it. The method of following things is largely deployed as an organising principle for post-disciplinary research using case studies that present detailed accounts of connected lives (Cook & Harrison, 2007: 40).

Following ‘things’ is commonly linked to object-oriented ontology, in turn associated with Graham Harman and ideas around speculative realism. Critics suggest this translates into an insistence that every thing is an object, as one suggests, “me, you, the toothfairy, soccer balls and the sun’s rays” (Miller, 2016: 507). A foundational text in this approach to social theory, however, can be found in Bruno Latour’s foundational account of how to follow scientists and engineers through society. My starting point in the studio shares Latour’s method of making an entry through the back door of [science] in the making, not through the more grandiose entrance of ready-made science (Latour, 1987: 4). Latour’s first rule of method is to “enter facts and machines while they are in the making; we will carry with us no preconceptions of what constitutes knowledge; we will watch the closure of the black boxes and be careful to distinguish between two contradictory explanations of this closure, one uttered when it is finished, the other while it is being attempted” (1987: 15).

Furthermore, Latour seeks to overcome organisation of science by discipline and object with sets of concepts, the most important “meta rule” being whether they allow outsiders to better follow science and technology. My method shares these intentions, as well as Latour’s injunction to consider symmetrically the efforts to enrol human and non-human resources (what he calls a flat ontology). Indeed, he says things do not exist without being full of people. A point of difference is that Latour’s rule of method does not look for *intrinsic* qualities in mechanisms but all the transformations they undergo *later* in the hands of others (1987: 258, original emphasis). I hope my research does both, through the studio as the imagination’s chamber where things are made and carry some notion of intrinsic value, and then through the collection as the switching points where matter is redirected. I do not however extend this methodological approach into the expanded terrain of Latour’s actor-network theory. Although the lives of the artworks are imbricated with other intermediaries including human beings, and the research underscores the importance of these imbrications, it is led by the artworks themselves. The study does not extend into a deep analysis and detailed mapping of the interrelations it makes evident. It understands ‘the thing’ as a knot “whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots; or in a word, things *leak*, forever discharging through the surfaces that form temporarily around them” (Ingold, 2008: 6, original emphasis). The imbrications make other kinds of findings possible.

Observations during the research period pointed to the limits of such a methodological approach. As indicated, catalytic events in the case studies of a buy-out and buy-in, respectively, disrupted linearity and indicated the existence of a web of interrelations instead. As Charles Eisenstein writes, regarding money, gift and society in transition: “Pioneer species pave the way for keystone species, which provide microniches for other species, which feed yet other species in a web of gifts that, eventually, circle back to benefit the pioneer species ... *The next stage of human economy ... will be cyclical, not linear*” (Eisenstein, 2011: 16, added emphasis). Indeed, most systems do not work in a simple linear fashion; writing about deterministic chaos, David Byrne says “small changes make for big differences and lots of things are brought into play, together” (2002: 18,19). This segues into the realm of complexity in which properties and the behaviour of a system are not determined by its parts but by their interaction (Nowotny, 2016: viii).

The key related learning was that following artworks was a valid strategic ploy as a method to structure the research but could also risk foreclosing how meaning was constantly renegotiated; or, as Becker put it earlier, that works of art have no stable existence but are continually changing. Indeed, a work of contemporary art is a very particular kind of ‘thing’ and its signified meaning is also contextual, infused by conceptualism and qualified by the art historical canon. It is also affected by extraneous factors such as curatorial framing and the management of related representational strategies. This became starkly evident during the research period, for example, when a public exhibition that opened mid-December 2016, *Our Lady*, curated at Iziko South African National Gallery, met with opposition. The exhibition’s curators included an artwork by Zwelethu Mthethwa, on trial at the time for murdering a woman, and public protests about his inclusion, as well as broader issues of representivity, ensued. Some artists included on the show also petitioned.¹⁹ Artworks (including the Mthethwa piece) loaned from a private collection were retracted from the walls to leave blank spaces. Context matters (see 3.4).

My implementation of this method thus differed from the essentialist approach that takes things encountered in the field at face value rather than assuming they are signifiers of something else (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell, 2007: 2). That essentialist position allows for ‘things’ to dictate the terms of their own analysis; my position does not quite go this far. Instead it occupies a middle space of hybridity, which acknowledges the agency of artworks and the importance of their critical autonomy but is also cognisant of their attenuation from other forces and relations. The ‘thing’ (artwork) was imbricated with its maker, the space in which it was made, and the networks it subsequently travelled beyond the studio door. The research made clear the artwork’s meaning was actively generated through such contextual movements and accruals over time. The artwork was not a static cultural artefact that simply functioned as a mirror; it played with the very experience of space and its structuring.

As Victor Buchli points out, the traditional view of material culture is a direct consequence of collecting traditions of the 19th century, liberal Enlightenment-era notions of universality, colonial expansion, industrialisation and the birth of consumerism (2002: 12). He says that more recently material culture has ruptured into

¹⁹ Mthethwa was found guilty in 2017 and sentenced to 18 years in prison.

interstitial positions that can engage with issues like gender fluidity, body/ object interfaces, recycilia, biotech, genetic engineering and the internet, “key materializing and transformative processes that shape new inclusions and exclusions” (Buchli, 2002: 15).²⁰

Considering these differences and limitations to object-oriented inquiry, following the things themselves is employed in this research as a methodological device to guide epistemology. The artworks are regarded as embodied meanings but these are unstable and constantly renegotiated and my understanding of the artwork’s potentiality is likewise open-ended. Like the work of Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter*, it is about how [sex] materialises or becomes worldly rather than a theory of the material world or a theory of matter as temporal (Ahmed, 2008: 33). The artworks are employed as “provocations to thought” (Turtle, 2007: 6), having life roles that are multiple and fluid. “I grew up hoping that objects would connect me to the world ... I determined that I would solve mysteries and that I would use objects as my clues” (Turtle, 2007: 3-4). Key observation tools to find my own clues in this worlding were repeat interviews, site visits, and visual research, which were triangulated in the analysis with artwork trajectories. Sector data and theoretical discourse further informed the findings.

There is also a useful distinction to be made here between objects and things. All objects relate to a dynamic world, writes Fiona Kerlogue in the context of Southeast Asia museums, and their stories cannot be seen in synchronic terms; rather, they provide opportunities for dialogue and connection (2004: xiii). Such vital materialism of theorists like Jane Bennett understands objects as things, their “thing-power ... the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience” (Bennett, 2012: 227). Bennett rejects Harman’s non-relational approach where the object is everything: “Perhaps there is no need to choose between objects and their relations,” she writes in a rebuttal. She recommends instead a theory that toggles between the two, since everyday experience identifies some effects as coming from individual objects and some from larger systems. My research engaging contemporary artworks as ‘things’ also rejects binary thinking and points to a relation

²⁰ The current recharged debate about repatriation of material culture and African artworks to the African continent refers (Sarr & Savoy, 2018).

between those things and systems that still allows for heterogeneity, difference and contestation. Édouard Glissant understands the concept of relation this way: “The poetics of Relation is the moment of *awakening the world’s imaginary in each of us*. For example, we understand that a desert in Peru and a desert in Africa have things in common and differences as well through which it’s exciting to establish a Relation between these commonalities and differences” (Diawara, 2011 16, added emphasis). This poetics induces a middle ground that Braidotti evocatively expands upon: “The thought of relation as a form of philosophical nomadism stresses the importance of the middle, in this mode of non-origin, non-purity and not-Oneness. Glissant defines this productive multiplicity as ‘echoes of the world’ ... They reconnect us to the living chaos of the world as living matter in transformation, a hybrid, dynamic resilient *bios/zoe* force of global creolization. Glissant captures this vitality and honours it as a poetics of an ethics of rhizomatic interconnections” (2006: 68, original emphasis).

I applied this method in the way of grounded theory, which offers an empirical approach to the study of social life through qualitative research and distinctive approaches to data analysis (Clarke, 2005: xxi). It is a blend: a method that generates theory on the back of empirical research. Grounded theory involves coding data, densifying these into categories and then building up theory of the substantive area. Its construction of theory oscillates between empirical data and analysis, which proceed simultaneously and streamline each other (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007: 2). This thesis research draws upon empirical studies of the atelier and the art collection, inducing particular insights from each case study (‘coding’), collating from these observations key concepts that correspond (‘densifying’), and leveraging these points of correspondence into findings to help build theory of the substantive area. In order to aid navigation through the case studies, the key concepts have been set out early.

Situational analysis is a particular development within grounded theory, as articulated by Adele Clarke who goes a step further by taking grounded theory into a deliberately spatial domain. That development suits an array of projects drawing upon interview, ethnographic, historical, visual, and/ or other discursive materials including multisite research (Clarke, 2005: xvii). Situational analysis offers three main cartographic approaches, including situational maps “that lay out the major human, nonhuman, discursive, and other elements in the research situation of inquiry and provoke analysis of relations among them” (Clarke, 2005: xvii). The idea, says Clarke, is not

to centre on the framing of action but instead elucidate the key elements, materialities, discourses, structures and conditions that characterise the situation of inquiry: “What I am ultimately grappling toward are approaches that can simultaneously address voice and discourse, texts and the consequential materialities and symbolisms of the nonhuman, the dynamics of historical change, and last but not least power in both its more solid and fluid forms” (2005: xxiii). Understanding the elements of a situation and their relation is key, and in a complex and heterogenous world, we need new methods to get there (Clarke, 2005: xxvii).

2.6. Research devices

This research study, as indicated, borrowed from anthropology and employed some ethnographic techniques to piece together clues about how (and why) art comes to matter. Ethnography, or comparative inquiry into the cultural aspects of human nature, has multimodal methodologies that mostly rely on qualitative data and these often shade into arts-based research methods (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 139). These include interviews, observational approaches and iterative-participatory techniques, and often physical mapping and audio-visual techniques (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 139). My research chiefly drew on 58 personal interviews (55 face-to-face), meetings, site visits, observations in situ including visual documentation, and relevant literature. The two case studies largely comprised qualitative research supplemented with secondary quantitative data on investment trends, indices and sector information, plus non-verbal data gleaned from objects, artworks and other non-human actors. The information afforded from this range of research devices was then triangulated with artwork trajectories.

This combination of devices constituted a form of “bricolage”, as Estelle Barrett has described creative arts research (2007: 191). The term has roots in the work of French structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who described ways of re-combining closed sets of materials to find new meaning. Moreover, “by his craftsmanship [the artist] constructs a material object which is also an object of knowledge” (Lévi-Strauss, 1972: 22). Today, artworks are also dematerialised. Conceptual art has liberated contemporary art from the object. As Tony Godfrey puts it: “Conceptual art is not about forms or material, but about ideas and meanings (1998: 5). But the point about artworks as potential knowledge bearers remains, “halfway between scientific knowledge and

mythical or magical thought ... the artist is both something of a scientist and of a ‘bricoleur’ ... the scientist creating events (changing the world) by means of structures and the ‘bricoleur’ creating structures by means of events” (Lévi-Strauss, 1972: 22). This evocation will become more important as the thesis proceeds, bringing both artistic and structural thinking together in its final analysis. In the resulting propositions generated in response to uncertainty, we will note “the human capacities to develop structures that turn indeterminacy into specific practical concepts capable of regulating behaviour and defining responsibilities” (Altieri, 2016: 245).

While following artwork journeys, this research sought nodes of value transfiguration – moments when assessments of value shifted, and their catalysts. In doing so, the ideas of ‘hosting’ and ‘ghosting’ became useful, and were inspired by the artist Donna Kukama.²¹ These terms could also be understood as appearances and disappearances, echoing De Boeck’s mountain and hole, above. I interpreted hosting as the successful breaching of the studio door, when artworks became formally visible in the public domain. These kinds of trajectories are demonstrated in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The collection in particular serves this function, having the switching power, through decisions on whether or not to accession a work, to render them more or less visible in circuits of validation. Indeed, this social production of materiality or durability is the effect of extensive cultural interventions, says Buchli, “the exchange value of the market or the science and politics of ... curation being prominent” (2002: 15). Ghosting, in contrast, followed a different kind of trail, observing ‘leftover’ objects gained from other sorts of evidence and fugitive forms. I considered examples of such ghosting as clues on the cutting-room floor as it were. They revealed information about underlying processes, which became more apparent as the research progressed. Ghostings were in fact productive trajectories in their own right and also helped make explicit the convergences or divergences that make things possible or impossible to produce. Curator Gabi Ngcobo, who co-founded an artist-led space Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR), which operated for a time from August House, told a 2015 public art conference, *Remaking Place*, that strategies of re-enactments are strategies of confronting ghosts or phantoms, “a paradoxical hurt one chases after in order to chase away”. Indeed, CHR was itself ghosted when it decided to commit

²¹ Kukama spoke about ‘ghosts’ and ‘hosts’ at a 2013 public discussion on independent art spaces at King Kong, Johannesburg, hosted by Visual Arts Network South Africa (VANSA) in relation to interventions with Center for Historical Re-enactments, at the time based at August House.

what it termed institutional suicide and end its own life, prior to August House being sold. Ghosts work against reified memory, writes Tim Edensor: a disembodied entity that can conjure up a half-recognisable world through empathetic contact but also provoking the ineffable and mysterious (2005: 835). Ghostly qualities are partly captured by the uncanny or *unheimlich*, Edensor adds, “wherein the familiar and homely suddenly become strange”. In a deeper sense, Edensor says the disruptive forces of modernity did something similar. August House certainly turned uncanny when it stopped being a home.



Fig. 14: The ghosts of artists past. Bié Venter’s empty studio after she left August House.

An example of ghosting in the first case study applied to an artwork I set out to track that got stymied in financial and logistical constraints so I ended up switching to follow another artwork series instead. This failure was interesting in and of itself since it demonstrated the material realities that impact upon artistic production. The intended sculpture was titled *Jacob XX* and the artist, Gordon Froud, had created it from prior works of his own, *Sperm Baby*. The latter comprised casts of doll heads and limbs grafted together. These forms were in turn recombined to create a plaster-of-paris conglomerate, *Jacob XX*. The title referred to the alleged 20 children sired by

then President Jacob Zuma. Chrysanthemums and crosses were added to allude to genetics, in particular repetitions and sequences. Froud created a complex mould of this sculpture to be cast into bronze and that is where things came to a halt during the research period. Later, he in fact managed to overcome this resource hurdle and exhibited a finished bronze of *Jacob XX* at Everard Read gallery. When I visited Froud's new studio after relocation from August House, this new sculpture was being stored under the stairs leading up to the mezzanine level. It had finally manifested, following a new alignment of possibilities. The nodal moments of transfiguration were quite clear: original dolls as found objects; creating their plaster-of-paris graftings; recycling these into a conglomerate form; devising a mould of the conglomerate; casting the sculpture into a precious metal; and publicly exhibiting the work for sale. The mould itself was also exhibited as part of a solo exhibition (Fig. 19).



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

Above: *Jacob XX* from *Sperm Baby* to bronze. Image credit for figures 19 & 20: Gordon Froud.

Another example of ghosting was Mary Sibande's sculptural artefact stored for the duration of the research period in the August House basement (Figs. 21-23). Sibande lived and worked in August House at the time. This rendition of her alter ego, Sophie, had an underground life of its own. I first photographed the figure with bulbous skirt in the basement parking, positioned with its head against a firehose reel. It seemed to be banging its forehead in frustration and humorously expressed the governing sentiment in the building at the time as tenants (including Sibande) readied themselves to relocate. Later, the artefact was covered in bubble wrap that over time unravelled. Then a line of crates transporting artworks to exhibition stood outside the lift on the basement floor. "Mary Sibande. Wish you were here" read the tagline, prefiguring the artist's August House departure. The career of Sibande, as she emptied her August House studio, continued to reach new heights. I spotted *Sophie* exhibited on a group show in Finland and later at a British Museum exhibition about South African contemporary art. The *Sophie* body of work largely concerned forging a new identity and place in the world; an oversize image of *Sophie* had even hung down a façade of August House during a public art event that conceived of the inner city as a gallery. During the research period, Sibande's oeuvre fathomed new ground with a visual language that articulated in purple tendrils a rhizomatic agency to imagine new futures.

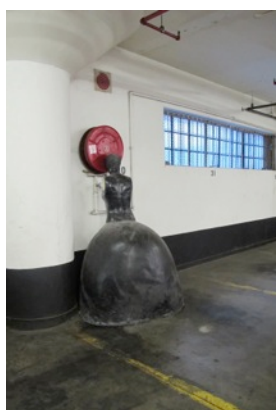


Fig. 21



Fig. 22

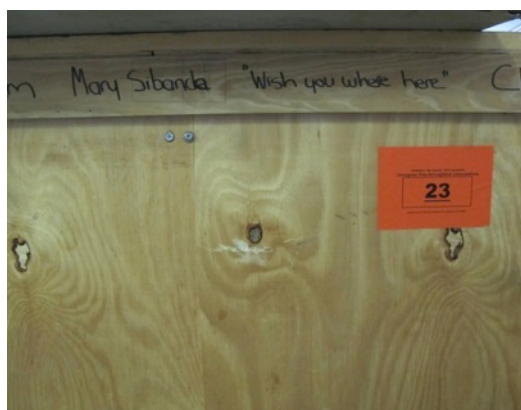


Fig. 23

Ghostings: Mary Sibande's sculptural mould of her alter ego, *Sophie*, in the August House basement and one of her installations packed for moving, far right.

The ghosting concept also applied to Chapter 5's valuation processes, where decisions to accession a work into a collection, or not to do so, affected its visibility. When a work is accessioned, it gains an enhanced provenance. It is also more likely to be exhibited, catalogued, stored and handled well, and generally cared for in the future with professional custodianship. The more prestigious the provenance, the more valuable a work of art is considered by other collectors and curators. By the same token, a work that fails to sell at an auction and pass into the hands of a collector is considered in artworld terminology to be "burnt".

Hosting and ghosting as a play between visibility and invisibility was also evident in the research site itself. Scheryn interviews were conducted in a business park in Westlake, about 20 kilometres from Cape Town central, private venues in the upmarket suburbs of Constantia and Camps Bay, an office in central Cape Town, and a meeting in Johannesburg's business centre, Sandton. Site visits included top-tier galleries and an auction at a hotel. By contrast, August House research was conducted from Doornfontein in Johannesburg inner city where there is a high proportion of working-class residents who live at the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum; 26.2% of these are migrants from other countries and 25.4% from another province, according to figures from Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) for a Quality of Life survey carried out during 2015-16.²² This means daily life is full of ghosting strategies to just get by. The area itself is also on the receiving end of ghosting, from inferior service delivery to heightened crime and risk vulnerabilities.

²² <https://africacheck.org/reports/mayors-claim-80-joburg-inner-city-residents-undocumented-foreigners-absurd/>

This section began by acknowledging that this thesis borrowed from anthropology and employed some ethnographic techniques to piece together clues about how (and why) art comes to matter. Anthropology has moved on to consider and configure the material conditions of our interactions, or “how does materiality function, what does it do, what are its new social costs and who is included or excluded, given a voice or silenced” (Buchli, 2002: 18-19). The mattering of contemporary art likewise encompasses inclusion and exclusion, or hosting and ghosting.

2.7. Ethics and dilemmas

The general ethos of this research study finds inspiration in Anna Tsing’s 2005 ethnography, *Friction*. A study of global interconnections, it showed how curious and creative cultural differences were in the grip of worldly encounter and what was overlooked. Tsing achieved this through “zones of awkward engagement, where words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak. These zones of cultural friction are transient; they arise out of encounters and interactions” (Tsing, 2005: xi). Moreover, Tsing’s general thesis was to look out for gaps in what she called the sticky materiality of practical encounter. “Gaps develop in the seams of universal projects; they are found where universals have not been successful in setting all the terms” (Tsing, 2005: 202). This enabled abstract claims to be explored through real-world operations, engaging how commodity chains were made up of uneven and awkward links: “Instead of starting with the dichotomy between global force and local response, these methods show the importance of contingent and botched encounters in shaping both business-as-usual and its radical refusals” (Tsing 2005: 272).

Radical refusals and the botched encounter were helpful as a research thought – when something did not work in the way it was expected to work, the unforeseen could be revealed. This was particularly true for the studio environment where artwork trajectories and their developments were open-ended and could not be anticipated in advance. The artworks, and occasionally the artists, were sometimes recalcitrant to ‘play along’ and this in itself had significance, as demonstrated by the refusal of *Jacob XX*. Sometimes this tendency revealed itself in botched encounters of my own – such as driving the wrong way down an unsigned one-way street to reach an artist in their new studio and very narrowly missing a head-on collision. In fact, locating

artists' studios could comprise a subsection of refusal analysis in itself. Studio trips were usually preceded by vague, confusing or non-existent directions. They were always located in offspaces in less salubrious parts of town, generally in unmarked buildings, often on unsigned streets, and never possessed a doorbell. A botched encounter could also be the experience of opening the door to an artist in blood-splattered shorts, having cut himself with a power tool the night before and self-bandaged. Or it could comprise following an artwork only to find it became part of another conflicting project and had to be put aside. It was also evident in the collection, whether through artworks that stayed put or a disruptive buy-out that recalibrated the entire portfolio. This kind of encounter is part of the territory.

The deeper point is that disruption is both generative and difficult because it brings along the unforeseen and it offers new possibilities. It makes latent forms more evident and puts established trajectories under strain. Examples of such encounters and their initial awkwardness helped in this research to surface less obvious linkages between space and imagination and ultimately led to emergent forms of collectivity. Disruptions were also a reminder of what was flagged earlier, that reality does not work in a linear fashion and that future forms are more cyclical. It was indeed Tsing's gaps in the sticky materiality of practical encounter (2005: 202) where insights were generated, and expectations renegotiated. The fieldwork was largely about being an observant witness and companion to process. It also required a certain inventiveness in methodology – similar to the case study subjects, who were all innovating new forms of different kinds in their respective spheres of practice and in response to flux.

The idea for this research was self-initiated, its underlying curiosities informed by earlier work as described in Chapter 1. It seemed that observing the making of artwork in the final days of a distinctive atelier's existence could be an interesting and worthwhile thing to initiate, and see where that research might lead. The study thus began with observing studio practice in an understated building in a working-class neighbourhood to articulate something of that atelier's inner life. There is a politics, however, to making such practices visible; the research should be conducted sensitively and with care. The same caveat applied later to the Scheryn collection, for different reasons – it was a new and original scheme set up within a private financial and legal mechanism so its internal processes had certain sensitivities to navigate and mutual agreement to establish on terms of engagement. My research involved

informed adults as key interlocutors but the ultimate subjects were the artworks, which led the way. The research posed no identifiable risk of harm to any of the sources; nonetheless it aimed to minimise any potential for this to transpire.

Key ethical considerations factored into the study included the following:

- Process was discretely observed, carefully documented with explicit, informed consent, and sensitively referenced. In addition, formal research agreements were drawn up to clarify and facilitate terms of engagement;
- My own relationship to August House as a prior tenant facilitated knowledge, access and trust. However, the research project was enacted only after my relocation to Cape Town to better mitigate any potential conflicts of interest, having both lived and worked in August House before the research period transpired. The relationship was transparent and potential bias actively countered but subjectivity remains in this position of critical proximity;
- An observational mode was adopted as far as possible to delineate researcher status and avoid unduly influencing related dynamics. I treated all informants professionally as sources during the research period and carefully drew the researcher distinction but it also required vigilance for crossover between domains;
- All key formal interview sources for both case studies had the research process explained to them, participated voluntarily and with signed consent, were able to withdraw at any time for their own reasons, and were updated as the research progressed including being informed of research outputs;
- Research was conducted in line with UCT's Faculty of Humanities ethics protocol and procedures regarding human participants. The research received the requisite signed approval from the Ethics Committee.

2.8. Outputs

A key challenge of arts-based research is developing outcomes whose form helps to carry the argument in a way that is congruent with the subject matter. James Clifford, who has written an interesting account called *Routes* of a world in constant motion, treats ethnography itself as a performance emplotted by powerful stories.

“Ethnographic writing is allegorical at the level both of its content (what it says about cultures and their histories) and of its form (what is implied by its mode of

textualisation)” (Clifford, 1986: 98). Likewise, in arts-based research (as for art production), this reciprocal relationship between content and form should be carefully considered. Kim Fortuin (2010: ii) asks how texts can help carry arguments, “operating not only as delivery devices but as messages in themselves, compelling statements in their form”. Fortuin says ethnographers should run more experiments, writing in forms known to constrain in order to understand, ethnographically, how discursive constraint really works to convey and also limit what can be said. “We also could write within the genre conventions of the novel, of the legal affidavit or the Japanese haibun ... learning more about what allows and disallows articulation and legibility ... Writing, then, is not only about representation or even evocation but a way to generate insight” (Fortuin, 2010: xi). Form is paramount, Fortuin insists, because it enacts meaning; the challenge is to get text to carry argument and *perform* an analysis (xii, original emphasis). “The right textual structure emerges from the material it structures” (Fortuin, 2010: xiii-xiv).

Taking this idea forward, I produced a companion book of creative nonfiction for the August House case study (Gurney, 2017a) as corollary to the thesis in a nod to arts-based research imperatives.²³ The book was structured as a narrative triptych, and designed by Fourthwall Books, to carry the argument and perform its analysis in a reciprocity between form and content that is also integral to works of contemporary art.²⁴ In artistic research, where creative output is part and parcel of the research endeavour, the exegesis is a re-enactment of the process it follows, a “double articulation ... a vehicle for validating the process of studio enquiry and elaborating the value of its outcomes” (Barrett, 2007: 160). This act of doubling is where researcher and artist can potentially find common ground, both concerned with creating new meaning amid contingencies. It is even understood in artistic research that certain forms of writing constitute creative practice; Gilbert (2016) goes so far as to suggest publishing *as* artistic practice – as his book title infers. In this vein, the *Journal of Artistic Research* considers an article as an exposition instead. Its founding issue editorial declared: “Depending on your field, exposition might not always be a

²³ It does not need to be read in tandem; the book is a separate albeit related entity that gives artistic expression to the content.

²⁴ The narrative structure climbs the building floor by floor, three times, to articulate first the studio environment, then artistic process, then artwork afterlife. Other examples of this reciprocity between form and content include images on each floor being colour-coded to orientate the reader in the storyline, supplemented by headers and footers denoting triptych section and building floor number. The paper is also recycled and shows up its flaws in a manner akin to studio process.

suitable word ... We encourage you to believe that instead of exposing practice as research, you could also stage, perform, curate, translate, unfold or reflect practice as research. Your chosen descriptor here is less important than the doubling it entails, which creates distance *within* practice through which understanding can operate” (Schwab, 2011, original emphasis).

This parallel creative writing process for the August House case study also helped conceive of Scheryn’s portfolio of artworks as a book of a different kind, derived from the expression ‘running a book’. The expression is commonly used in a variety of financial circles to indicate managing new equity, debt or securities instruments. In investment banking, the book runner is the underwriting firm in charge of the books. The book is the portfolio of financial instruments held by a brokerage or bank. Book value is an accounting term that refers to the value of the shares if the company were to liquidate its assets and pay off all its debt obligations. I loosely adopted ‘running a book’ for the Scheryn collection case study, to creatively extend the conceptual play in this thesis with the notion of a book. The book is conceived as a portfolio of fine art rather than equity, and its runner is the collection manager. The running of the book was the management of the collection (Chapter 5). As will become clear, the original roots of this collection were in an art fund, so this analogy has some conceptual play.

In the writing process, qualitative researchers have a dilemma around positionality to resolve – when to self-reflexively enter the narrative frame to acknowledge subjectivity and associated blind spots and when to step outside the frame in the pursuit of more objectivity. Always present in social sciences is the issue of the dirty lens, according to Gillian Tett (2016), the former anthropologist cited earlier on dangers of silo thinking. She offered four ways to combat this smudged perspective: becoming aware of personal biases; putting yourself in circumstances different to your own; trying to have no preconceived ideas; and realising that bias is stubborn (Tett, 2016). To a certain extent, subjectivity is unavoidable but artworks can offer a powerful antidote as a portal into other worlds and spaces. Sarat Maharaj (2017) addressed the artwork’s way of knowing, at an artistic research symposium, as “smudged futures” that worked against the desire for certainties and false endings. Indeed, what becomes apparent in this research is a cycle of neverendings. These neverendings were constantly present in the research itself in a series of second lives that defied a definitive point of origin and closure.

Before closing this chapter, a brief note regarding the treatment of visuals in this thesis. All the images are my own visual research and documentation, unless otherwise credited. The visuals helped as observation devices, recording moments and physical spaces that I could revisit when reflecting upon research material and also acted as empirical data in their own right. In the case of August House, they even became historical and archival documents once the atelier changed hands. The portraits of the August House tenants were commissioned and directed from a professional photographer specifically for this project in order to capture the tenants in their respective studio work spaces before they moved out. The Scheryn case study leant itself to fewer moments of visual opportunity and most of the photographs are formal artwork representations provided by the manager of the collection, often courtesy of the artist's gallery, and republished with permission. The placement of these visuals within the thesis has various functions, aided by captions: sometimes they accompany textual moments; at other times they visually demonstrate a concept; or they operate more poetically and on their own visual terms to make allusions instead.

Chapter 3: Literature review

This literature review sets out a general theoretical framework of an expanded new materialism, to which the research corresponds. The chapter then engages the specific territory of the case studies by first of all reflecting upon the studio as the crucible of artistic thinking and connects the particular contribution of the August House case study to current apprehensions of cultural value from a spate of recent significant inquiries into the same. This is followed by a section on metrology or the valuation practice constituting a market, in particular its performativity, and what this theoretical framework offers for understanding the Scheryn collection in the broader context of the art market. The final section extends the dialogue between these different modalities of apprehending value and valuation of contemporary art to make plain the contribution of the thesis to current literatures and towards instantiating a different kind of understanding of contemporary art as a vector of value that takes a measure of the world as it moves.

3.1. Theoretical framework

The thesis deals with two core modalities of value and valuation, firstly in separate case studies, set out in Chapters 4 and 5, before bringing them into correspondence to make joint findings through diffraction. The first case study explores notions of intrinsic value or the meaning that practice and process confers upon an artwork before it breaches the studio door (August House). The second investigates how meaning is further conferred and accrued as the artwork migrates in circuits of extrinsic valuation (Scheryn). Each analysis deals respectively with the complexities of material production and consumption yet their boundaries are found to be porous and demonstrated as such. The artworks in the studio, for instance, *do* breach the studio door and their subsequent trajectories inflect the artwork's meaning. The outside world also permeates the insular space of the atelier: when the building is put up for sale, artistic production is affected. The artworks accessioned into the collection, meanwhile, continue to be inflected by the ongoing (studio) practice and process of their makers. And, as already indicated, the artwork is not a stable entity; its value is imbricated with its nomadism. The synthesis work of Chapter 6 brings these two modalities into dialogue since different insights can be gained by reading

these approaches through one another. This literature review takes the same approach with a short concluding section.

First of all, then, the overarching theory most pertinent to the ambit of this thesis is new materialism, sometimes called neo-materialism, which takes seriously the idea of things as agents along *with* humans (Poe, 2011: 153, original emphasis). One of its foundational theorists, Diana Coole, says there are signature elements to new materialism, the most distinctive being the invocation of a generative or vital ontology of immanence (2013: 451). She says the so-called materialist turn has appeared over the past decade in the wake of the cultural or linguistic turn, a paradigm that looks too limited in light of new challenges emerging from novel ways of understanding matter, handling objects, and interacting with nature (Coole, 2013: 452). Specifically, Coole identifies two overlapping attributes. Firstly, an ontology of becoming in which the very processes involved in the materialisation of matter are being redescribed rather than a state; secondly, renewed attention to actual material changes and processes that are currently underway (Coole, 2013: 453).

Coole herself advocates moving on sharply from these factors to consider the material circuits, flows and experiences that mark the 21st century – what she terms a “capacious historical materialism” (2013: 452). This kind of materialism integrates detailed and fine-grained empirical studies of micro-level phenomena with attention to intermediate structures of political economy and broader macro-level systems (Coole, 2013: 453). The latter includes geopolitical as well as ecological elements. Further, new materialism is a non-linear reading where matter is not inert; for some time, it has moved towards an understanding of matter as a complex open system subject to emergent properties (Hird, 2004: 226). New materialism also normalises difference rather than seeking to distil matter’s “incalculable variation” to a single explanation of reality (Hird, 2004: 227). In all these resonant ways, new materialism corresponds to this thesis research.

New materialism is critiqued by Sara Ahmed, among others, for its potential to make a fetish object of matter and thus reintroduce binarism between matter and culture (Ahmed, 2008: 35). Charles Altieri goes further to suspect new materialism is the theology or mythology of our times (2016: 241-2). Altieri bases this upon two key criticisms: a plausible materialist ontology would need to correlate with a workable

historical materialism and yet the two are difficult to reconcile; and its methodologies are not necessarily acceptable to science. Altieri says the exciting new insights and illuminations new materialism offers must be backed up with compelling analytic arguments (Altieri, 2016: 242). At the heart of his critique is an insistence that human consciousness is different to other modes of vital habitation on earth (Altieri, 2016: 244). I agree with this final underlying critique and propose that Altieri's criticisms are largely averted in the application of a new materialist approach to works of contemporary art, for reasons that will become clear. A related critique of new materialism comes from Andrew Poe in a review of Coole and Frost's edited book on the same. In addition to problematics around the political implications, Poe asks about the aesthetic dimension to 'things' and thus whether the work of art may be a limiting factor on the theory. "So much emphasis on what is agential and how it remains independent of us seems to hold at bay the world, which is agential because of us" (Poe, 2011: 161). The human creation-of-things needs accounting for, Poe adds. This cues my own research and its positionality within this broader theoretical framework.

Less attention has been paid to how new materialism may apply to the world of contemporary art, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, and this research extends it in that direction. I prefer using the terminology 'things' to objects because artworks can also be performative, ephemeral or purely conceptual ideas and 'things' helps to connote something in excess of the object itself. As explained earlier in the research design chapter, works of fine art relate to a canon so they have both an historical reflexivity and a conceptual heft that may imbue them with a particular force as singular 'objects'. Related, they are made or thought up by human hands and minds (what August House artist Gordon Froud called "hands-on, or if not hands-on then brains-on"). These artefacts are then propelled into networks of circulation by the decisions and actions of human beings and other networks that act as intermediaries with the capacity, as identified earlier, to switch or redirect matter. Moreover, as works of contemporary art, they arguably complete their meaning as a public good when they venture outwards into the public domain – the equivalent of a text being published.

A deeper engagement here with the work of Altieri offers a generative push and pull. He writes in a compelling way about extending new materialism to linguistics – a dual capacity of "now", as he puts it, which can introduce new awareness of paths to follow, plus the power of "seeing as" to account for these transitions (2016: 254).

Also engaged with artworks, Altieri offers an example of this dual capacity which he experienced when viewing a painting in a gallery, building on what seemed surprising in what he was seeing: “these aspects of behaviour are closely linked to what is involved in responsiveness to the kinds of structures provided by works of art” (Altieri, 2016: 254). Altieri’s “seeing as” involves appreciating linguistic structures like metaphor as well as having empathy in attending to how other people see, he adds. This holds affinity with the thesis findings to come, regarding the power of artworks to shift perspective by creating new structures to apprehend our reality (and vice versa), but then perspectives diverge.

Altieri views artworks that are only concerned with momentary embodiment as limited and their indeterminacy foolish unless they are also drawing attention to pressures producing that indeterminacy and the possible values of addressing those pressures (2016: 251). Yet it is arguable that ephemeral works concerned with momentary embodiment can be ideally placed to do exactly that *because* of their indeterminacy; they cannot be easily captured financially or otherwise, and thus act as a timely and much-needed riposte to instrumentalisation in addition to their other affects. Further, Altieri’s understanding of a work of art as primarily concerned with the personal and with aesthetics is limiting; a work of contemporary art may well correspond with those concerns but is also made in a context which infuses it with meaning and propels it to connect with other human beings and their own lived experience. The personal is in this sense a potential hinge to the public. Altieri also sees artworks as having no necessary relation to one another beyond their own animation. But works of contemporary art, as demonstrated elsewhere in this thesis, are also given meaning collectively, as part of an artist’s broader oeuvre and as part of a larger canon. This attribute is activated for instance by curatorial juxtapositions in exhibition or acquisition, which can and do attenuate the making of meaning. Altieri writes: “Making the actor into a self, especially a self responsible for and to something beyond the action, requires attention to cultural and historical frameworks as the substance eliciting expressions” (2016: 249). Absolutely – otherwise new materialism takes us straight to the problematics of objectification and the attendant co-option of art objects by institutions and other power brokers of art discourse. A contemporary artwork takes cultural and historical frameworks as part of its substrate.

My research acknowledges the reification of artworks and their autonomous agency in their journeys from the studio outwards but refers in its findings to the entanglements through which the artwork performs its meaning over time. Research findings come from this messy middle rather than an idea of a linear flow, an immersion in what Donna Haraway (1989) calls “the traffic” between nature and culture. In this application of new materialism to works of contemporary art, the theory moves beyond the social sciences and contributes to new pathways for investigating what was earlier termed geo-aesthetics. This thread will be picked up again at the close of the chapter, with respect to anthropologies of art.

Object-based methods and ontology, introduced in Chapter 2, are congruent with this new materialism(s) framework. The earlier cited work of Latour, Bennett and Braidotti forms part of this extended family. But it is specifically the ‘agential realism’ put forward by Karen Barad (2003) that offers a coherent theoretical foil for this research study. Her approach is to foster constructive engagements across disciplinary boundaries, and stresses in these entanglements the interconnected nature of the material world and discursive practices as mutually implicated in a process she describes as diffraction – or reading different perspectives through one another. An example of material-discursive practice in action is, for instance, when distinctions (boundaries) are drawn. The process of artwork accession in this research is an example of such material-discursive practice. Agential realism acknowledges that the capacity to be an agent belongs to both subjects and structures (Coole, 2013: 458). This study attends to both those agentic capacities but begins with the studio in order to privilege the artist’s thinking as the starting point in this diffraction rather than the other way around, where the collector of an artwork gets to recursively set the frame.

Barad’s philosophy is a performative rather than representational approach, challenging the power of language to determine what is real, and calling upon what she terms intra-action, or “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Hein, 2016). This shifts the focus to practices/ doings/ actions along with questions of ontology, materiality and agency. Matter is viewed as generative, “not a thing but a *doing*, a congealing of agency” (Hein, 2016: 136, added emphasis). Discursive practices also produce material bodies (Barad, 2003: 808); “this is not a static relationality but a doing – the enactment of boundaries – that always entails constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability” (Barad,

2003: 803). Moreover, Barad advocates a causal relationship between specific exclusionary practices embodied as specific material configurations of the world (discursive practices) and specific material phenomena (relations) (2003: 814). In an agential realist account, “*discursive practices are specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted*” (Barad, 2003: 821, original emphasis). In this theory, meaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but *an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility* (added emphasis). By the same token, relations become ‘things’ which brings us back to an object-based method through ‘thingification’. Barad’s agential realism also destabilises the distinction between human and non-human, since what it means to be human is constantly shifting, and she calls this condition the posthuman. This division is destabilised in this research with devices like granting August House artistic agency. Ultimately this is a hopeful philosophy because it understands agency as “the ongoing reconfigurings of the world” (Barad, 2003: 818).

There are two recurring critiques of Barad’s philosophy. The one argues that agential realism emphasises the important role of matter in inquiry but it also establishes a two-world ontology between the material and the discursive (Hein, 2016: 137; Calvert-Minor, 2014: 125). Related, Hein points out that while “matter matters”, the *type* of matter also matters (2016: 138). Indeed – a work of fine art, as already described, is a very particular type of matter. Secondly, Barad’s dismissal of the centrality of the human is critiqued as lacking a coherent sense of objectivity, even called “anti-humanist” (Calvert-Minor, 2014: 127). This critique perhaps overplays Barad’s intention but has a point about not sacrificing good epistemology. A related feminist critique argues that Barad reinscribes masculinist devaluation of passivity in favour of the active dimension of matter: “It is ethically and politically vital to hold on to a notion of subjectivity understood in terms of the capacity for experience, on account of which sentient being is exposed to suffering” (Braunmühl, 2017: 1).

In this thesis, I extend Barad’s helpful theory of agential realism by applying its performativity to the journey of the artwork and in this application underscore an expanded idea of new materialism. This turns away from duality towards what Appadurai (1986) describes as the social life of things. I share with Appadurai the methodological emphasis on things in motion that illuminate human and social

context. I do so without disavowing the labour behind that production of materiality, and in fact privilege this by starting the research in the studio. And, while underscoring the dispersed agentic capacities of Coole, this research does not lose sight of the responsibility of human agents for imperiling the entire ecosystem (Coole, 2013: 461). It thus introduces ecological thinking as a larger critical frame. As Coole says, it is important to move beyond Bennett's vitalism to also reflect upon the circuits through which matter flows to better appreciate the challenges current forms of production and consumption involve and to think realistically about ways to potentially transform them (Coole, 2013: 463). While artworks cannot take a responsibility that human actants can, their acquisition and dissemination happens in a context that needs to be attended to as part of their constituent matter. This could even be considered as another medium in their constituent assemblage.

This chapter now moves through the two different modalities of value and valuation that the thesis traverses, starting with the intrinsic view from within the studio, before concluding.

3.2. Value in the studio



Figs. 24-26: The threshold: Gordon Froud's studio doors – August House before moving out (left); August House after Sam Nhlengethwa moves in (centre); Froud's new studio at Nugget Square (right).

The studio is the starting place in this research for getting to grips with 'what art is', a philosophical rabbit-hole that nonetheless needs some exploration to begin unpacking different notions of value. This links back to George Dickie's institutional theory

described earlier, “an artifact a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)” (Yanal, 1998: 2). Conceptualism freed the artwork from its materiality and in so doing gave greater agency to immaterial factors like the idea to constitute what makes an artefact a work of art. I will not enter a definitional quagmire suffice to say that institutional theory takes the artwork beyond purely aesthetic considerations. The institution in Dickie’s definition is not necessarily a corporation but “an established practice” (1974: 29). Dickie himself built upon earlier theorists, particularly from the 1950s, who rejected the traditional method that sought to discover art’s essence in some function common to all works of art and instead positioned the work within a multiplaced network of much greater complexity than anything envisaged by earlier theories (Kelly, 1998: 31). Dickie’s institutional theory is critiqued by Richard Wollheim (1980) among others, querying who represents this amorphous artworld and whether sometimes such “factions and coteries” can be for the better (Wollheim, 1980: 166). The theory is also criticised for strong proceduralism (Matravers, 2000: 43) – that all there is to being a work of art is to be an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public. It is not as simple as that, but there is some consensus that a coterie of academics, researchers, critics, artists, curators and gallerists among the artworld all help shape the discourse of what constitutes art and that this notion shifts over time. Before the work engages the artworld, however, it is birthed in the studio or its equivalent.

Daniel Buren (2012) describes the studio as the first frame of production, the first limit upon which all subsequent frames or limits will depend. He says the museum or gallery and studio are linked to form the foundation of the same edifice and the same system: “To question one while leaving the other intact accomplishes nothing. Analysis of the art system must inevitably be carried on in terms of the studio as the unique space of production and the museum as the unique space of exposition” (Buren, 2012: 83). Both must be investigated as ossifying customs of art, Buren writes – notably, in a text republished from 1971. Since then, the concept of the studio (and art) has moved on but the larger point about the studio as first frame remains; it is still the key place of work for most artists, however conceived. As Buren points out, the studio is a place of production, storage and distribution – since gallerists, dealers and curators may also visit to select works and discuss them. It is important to recognise the studio is not just a private space but already often permeated by the

market. Nonetheless, Buren says the studio is where the artwork truly belongs in the sense that it is closest to its own reality there, before being subject to infinite manipulation serving other purposes even its creator may not anticipate (Buren, 2012: 85). This “own reality” is the notion of intrinsic value that the first case study was designed to track, despite the apparent paradox that “when the work is in place, it does not take place (for the public), while it takes place (for the public) only when not in place – that is, in the museum ... Thus, the unspeakable compromise of the portable work” (Buren, 2012: 85). Buren bemoans the disconnect between the richness of an artwork in situ and its banality torn from its context, yet an artwork that stays put in the studio is a “non-entity” (2012: 88). He says the studio creates objects that complement our society of exchange and market value and its value is directly influenced by exchangeability, critically relying on the artwork’s “eternal nomadism” (Buren, 2012: 90).

As Conceptual art in the late 1960s dematerialised the artwork and unmoored it from physical constraints, so the contemporary studio could also be a laptop or a street. “A studio isn’t just a place where artists make art but a platform for negotiation and a stage for performance,” writes Sarah Thornton (2008: 203), after visiting the studio of renowned artist Takashi Murakami. His studio practice famously engages a large number of assistants with artist credits on exhibitions that can take up an entire wall. Thornton found that what united this complex, transnational, multistudio setup of the Japanese artist with the post-studio, periphery-embracing, anticraft ethos of the Californian conceptualist, Michael Asher, was a shared keen sense of discipline (Thornton, 2008: 201).

Jens Hoffmann, in his introduction to a volume that deals with the role and function of the studio in contemporary artistic practice and its shift from a site to a situation, says artists throughout history have conceived of the studio in various ways – from the starting point for their own work (Rembrandt van Rijn’s *Artist in his Studio* c.1629) to the recent trend in the artworld of representing and displaying complete artists’ studios by museums and galleries (Hoffmann, 2012: 13). Indeed, this played out during the research period itself: a representation of the studio of Froud formed part of his solo exhibition at the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, a national art festival in Oudtshoorn (Fig. 19).

For the moment, in order to reflect upon more general notions of intrinsic value that the studio generates, I will subsume artistic value into the larger umbrella term of cultural value, despite the legitimate risks of conflating the two. The resurgence of interest in stores of value, uncertainty and risk following the 2007-08 global financial crisis was noted in Chapter 1's research rationale but cultural value has been paid much less attention than other notions of value in the ensuing recalibrations.²⁵ The authors of a recent UK report on understanding the value of arts and culture say it is hard to find an established discourse of 'cultural value' within academic inquiry and the term in many ways makes its way into academic discussion from elsewhere (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 13). They also note that the concept of cultural value may even be seen as a construct of policy. In the UK, which has helped lead creative economies discourse globally, this lack of attention has been partially redressed through a spate of recent research inquiries. A brief recap of this important body of grey literature offers a helpful starting point to further interrogate artistic value because it provides a useful overview of the key points of current debate and its gaps, and how this research engages and extends this investigative ground.

The focus upon UK reports is worthwhile because the UK has strongly advocated for economic validation of the arts and current South African public policy in many respects followed this lead, with attendant problematics. Because of the UK's pivotal role in these debates, related learnings have implications for South African policymakers and art practitioners (and vice versa). What emerges from this overview is how the creative economies discourse is increasingly critiqued as reductive and instrumentalist. This in turn begs the need for other conceptions of why art matters, a broader conversation into which this thesis makes its own contribution. These reports reflect key concerns and concepts the thesis intersects with and develops upon, as below.

a) The AHRC Cultural Value Project (2016), an inquiry supported by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), had two main objectives: to identify the components that make up cultural value, and to consider and develop methodologies and evidence to evaluate them. It attempted to break down the divide between the intrinsic and instrumental camps – that is, of art for art's sake or art for economic

²⁵ The BBC's podcast series *The value of culture* offers an interesting overview (Bragg, 2012-13).

benefit. It centred upon individual actual experience and worked outwards from there in its bid to assess why arts and culture matter. “The value begins there, with something fundamental and irreducible, and all the other components in the framework might be seen, to a greater or lesser extent, to cascade from it” (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 21). In this key respect, its report titled *Understanding the value of arts & culture* resonates with the ambit of the thesis; its research started with individual experience in the studio and worked its way out to explore an alternative value proposition. Components of cultural value in the AHRC study included elements such as reflectiveness, empathy and imagination about other life circumstances and possible futures – an effective way, then, to counter Tett’s smudged lens. Such components were ahead of concerns like the economy, health or cities (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 57). Such characteristics form part of artistic thinking, in Chapter 4.

The report also acknowledged that the contribution of arts and culture to other areas was often embedded in individual experience and small-scale assets. The idea was to stress a complex ecology of talent, finance, content and ideas rather than binary worlds. “Culture is an organism not a mechanism; messier and more dynamic than linear models allow” (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 99). This AHRC report drew upon over 70 pieces of original research, critical reviews of literature, and workshops. A range of methodologies included arts-based research, ethnographies and network analyses. Its findings chimed with both thesis case studies, which also demonstrated a rupture of linearity in favour of a dynamic web of relations instead.

b) An ecological approach to the artworld, above, was also highlighted by the 2015 Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value. Its report, *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth*, generated three major insights. These were: cultural and creative talents comprised both a public good and a commercial return; they existed in a distinct ecosystem; and insufficient attention had been paid to synergies within the latter. The commission’s understanding of an ecosystem described the interconnectedness of the cultural and creative industries in terms of the flow of ideas, talent and investment from public and private sources that characterised them (Knell, 2015: 21). These flows, the report said, generated economic value, audiences and consumers.

Likewise, an ecological understanding of the artworld also emerged from my thesis research. I firstly came to understand August House, or the atelier, as an ecosystem of sorts. This is described in Chapter 1, for instance when Gibson Khumalo, one of the former caretakers, described the atelier's sale as a mess thrown into the bird's nest (personal interview, 2014). That characterisation proved a helpful metaphor. Further, the rooftop garden shifted nomadically within the building and came to symbolise its transition. The building also represented an ecosystem through the range of its tenants; they included not only art practitioners but also a fine art logistics company, an exhibition and art installation company, a commercial gallery, a non-commercial project space and a residency space for visiting artists. Scheryn fitted with the idea of an ecosystem too, as set out by Anders Petterson (Table 2). His schematic referenced all the so-called 'tastemakers' that usually participate in the Western contemporary art market ecosystem (i.e. Euro-America), which together carry out an endorsement process (Petterson, 2014). This table is extended in Chapter 6 by my own Cascade model drawn from ecosystem services thinking (Figure 72).

c) The Arts Council England's report, *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society: An Evidence Review*, affirmed the importance of starting with the intrinsic, or "how arts and culture illuminate our inner lives and enrich our emotional world" (Mowlah et al., 2014: 4). This is partly a philosophical assertion, the report said, that cannot be measured in numbers – yet the arts did confer certain benefits and were a strategic national resource that also needed to be appreciated. The report set out this balancing act and drew attention to gaps in literature and data that pointed to an holistic case. An holistic case meant arts and culture had complex, subtle and interrelated impact, and each benefit related to a cluster of other benefits (Mowlah et al., 2014). The report called for a new language of cultural value that in time would help better understand the contribution the arts made to our lives. This thesis research likewise began with the intrinsic – the studio – and progressed from there. The disruption of the linear method resonates with the complex, subtle and interrelated impact described in this report, and it also sought to develop a new language of artistic value through an alternative script.

In summary, reflecting on the above reports, this thesis can be understood as part of a family of recent inquiries into cultural value. It extended some of the attributes the inquiries elucidated and added others of its own, from a global South context and

focusing more pointedly upon artistic value as a subset of cultural value. Starting within the studio, the research sought to understand the contribution of contemporary art specifically to a broader discourse on (cultural) value by following the trajectories of artworks, the principles behind their making, and the artistic thinking they embodied and carried out into the world (Chapter 4).

3.3. Valuation in the collection

This thesis apprehends contemporary art as a vector of value, a finding that arises from closely following how ideas about value shift on artwork journeys from the studio to the collection, and in turn what contemporary art may take the measure of as it moves. The science of measurement is called metrology. And, as already noted, performativity is a key animating idea in this body of work. A theory called metrological performativity is thus worth exploring for the territory of the second case study of the art collection, in particular its engagement with the art market (Chapter 5). There are different conceptions of this theory but essentially it emphasises the social aspects of markets; at heart it conceives economics as a set of practices that go beyond the measurement of economic agents to also shape, format or discipline them (Davis, 2006: 3). As such, it holds that markets re-inscribe themselves in a kind of replicating function. Value and valuation of artworks are indeed performed – a dual process of description and enactment. But this performance takes place in a social context. “Markets are immersed in social relations that go well beyond the exchange act ... Actors are as likely to take advantage of instances of performativity as they are to be performed” (Davis, 2006: 16).

Davis outlines key limits to metrological performativity, which can make the theory conceptually and empirically restrictive. These are: a generalised ‘ideal’ economic model, which glosses over the distinctions between markets; a focus upon isolated acts of exchange between anonymous buyers and sellers, which precludes social relations; the observation that processes of numerical calculation have crucial social and cultural elements that metrological performativity struggles to take on board; the rational, self-interest of actors is assumed according to accounting norms; there is confusion about what performs economic action; and most case studies are presented ahistorically (Davis, 2006: 5-6). The approach of metrological performativity to the artworld also has limitations because it imagines markets (or ‘fields’ as Bourdieu

would have it) as self-contained or disentangled from wider networks. The artworld may imagine itself in a similar way but the importance of intermediaries and organising structures is clear. Artwork staging or showcasing occurs via collections, exhibitions, biennales, art fairs, auction floors, museum collections and even social media, and this staging implicates a host of players. Value is transfigured en route as the artworks move through these different nodal points. Such movements often seem somewhat arbitrary but there are systems at work that shape these flows and their likelihood, even their field of possibility. And because of the general opacity in the artworld, the power of intermediaries (critics, advisors, gallerists, agents) in negotiating these pathways is highly inflated. “Financial markets are often exclusive places, with few significant players, and are dominated by personal networks” (Davis, 2006: 8). The artworld certainly has this in common with financial markets albeit the latter is at least regulated and open-market mechanisms have some transparency.

Taking cognisance of these limitations, the work of Michel Callon in this body of literature is instructive, linking to the earlier reading of Latour’s *Science in Action* that informed the research method. Callon describes performativity in economic terms as “assuming that agency is distributed and that concrete markets constitute collective calculative devices with variable, adjustable configurations” (Callon, 2005: 3). This thesis shares the understanding of action as framed agency, taking place in hybrid collectives comprising human beings as well as material and technical devices and texts (Callon, 2005: 4) – Callon calls these *agencements* to acknowledge that agencies and arrangements are not separate. This echoes with the idea in agential realism, noted earlier, that both subject and structure have agentic capacity. Asymmetries between agencies may be considerable, adds Callon, and might mix or merge.

One important extension of this work is to treat calculative and non-calculative agencies symmetrically; Callon gives the examples of an altruistic gift, interpersonal relationship and maximising profit, and says they all carry the same artificiality. “Both forms of agency imply huge investments, especially material” (2005: 5). While agencies are at the centre of markets, other components like exchange of merchandise are implied which involves an entanglement of actors and collective work, and Callon calls these vital heterogeneous actors “professionals of entangling” rather than intermediaries or manipulators (2005: 6). Yet he stresses disentanglements are of equal importance – monetary compensations to free the agencies, without which no

accumulation would be possible, and ‘overflows’ or factors that are excluded from the frame in order to transact (akin to what was earlier termed ‘ghostings’).

Artworks, however, represent a strange form of attachment; they continue in various ways to be entangled with both the maker and the buyer despite any compensations or disentanglements that might have been made. The buyer for instance accepts a custodianship that carries certain entangled obligations around handling, care, storage, and presentation. The maker on the other hand holds on to copyright and the moral right of being attributed as author of the work, and may object to an artwork being recontextualised in a way that contradicts or undermines its conceptual intent. In some countries, artists even reserve a financial right on resales, as Chapter 6 will engage with the legal ‘right to follow’. Moreover, other comparable artworks created by the artist and their associated reputation continue to ebb and flow, affecting in turn the perceived ‘value’ of the artwork acquired. That all said, the idea to modulate the face-off between producer and consumer through the impact of Callon’s *agencements* (agencies and arrangements, together) is noted and is relevant to the application of Barad’s diffraction, or viewing different perspectives through one another.

Callon’s work shares a common interest in materiality and the performative nature of economic action with another theorist, Daniel Miller, but then their paths diverge. Miller’s main critique of Callon is that his focus upon calculation and disentanglement attempts “to rescue more conventional notions of the market, for no particular good reason” (2005: 5). Miller’s work comes from a material culture viewpoint within anthropology where he sees concern with actants and *agencements* working themselves out in parallel debates within material culture studies (Miller, 2005: 3). He views these in turn as extending the work of Bourdieu’s contributions. Such agents, as Bourdieu points out, are more reasonable than rational – they are “guided by intuitions and anticipations arising out of a practical sense which very often leaves the essential factors implicit and which ... engages in strategies that are practical in the dual sense of implicit and expedient” (Miller, 2005: 9). Bourdieu calls this formation of value on which calculation is to be performed *illusio*, or the fundamental belief in the value of the stakes and of the game itself. And he uses the artistic world by way of example: “No amount of calculation regarding the calculations which take place in the art market ... will contribute one jot to an understanding of the mechanisms which constitute the work of art as a value that can

be subject to economic calculation and transactions” (Bourdieu, 2005: 9). This is evident in the Scheryn case study, for example, when the key interlocutor describes outlier auction prices as unrelated to intrinsic value and based instead upon the assumption that somebody else will pay more (Steyn, personal interview, 2015). The ultimate reasons, Bourdieu states, lie beyond or outside calculation and calculating reason in the obscure depths of an historically constituted habitus (2005: 10), or dispositions that are deeply embedded. What is more, agents – defined by the capital they possess – determine the structure of the field that determines them (Bourdieu, 2005: 193).

Further, Bourdieu says the force attached to agents depends on the volume and structure of the capital they possess, namely: financial capital (actual or potential mastery of financial resources); cultural capital (including capital of information about the field); technological capital (portfolio of scientific resources or technical resources); commercial capital (sales power); social capital (totality of resources activated through a network of relations that procures a competitive advantage) and symbolic capital (mastery of symbolic resources based on knowledge and recognition such as goodwill investment) (Bourdieu, 2005: 194-5). He adds: “The worse placed [agents] are ... the more it restricts the *space of possibles* open to them ... It is the logic of the field and the intrinsic force of concentrated capital that impose relations of force favourable to the interests of the dominant. And they have the means to transform these relations of force into an apparently universal set of rules” (Bourdieu, 2005: 232). In short, Bourdieu believes the dominant class in capitalist society is the beneficiary of power, which is embodied in economic and cultural capital and imbricated through society’s institutions and practices which also reproduce it (Lechte, 1994: 45). This section on valuation thus circles back to the metrological performativity it started with: how such markets re-inscribe themselves in a kind of replicating function. These are the infrastructures of art that are often designed to naturalise their own presence (Bakke & Peterson, 2017: 275), and which Chapter 5 unsettles with its various examples of Callon’s *agencements* and professionals of entangling.

3.4. Extending the dialogue

Chapter 1 put forward Bourdieu's idea that a sociology of art has to take as its object not only the material but also the symbolic production of the work, which this thesis sets out to do. This kind of fieldwork in philosophy, as Bourdieu termed his work, produces a grounded theory of social life that straddles theoretical analysis and empirical work. He is further concerned with "the present moment of capitalism [which] threatens to forestall or eliminate discussions about social, political, and economic alternatives" (Brown & Szeman, 2000: 5-6). Threats to autonomy result from the increasingly greater interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money, Bourdieu holds, and critical capacity lies in inverse proportion to penetration by the market. However, this view does not leave sufficient room for the agency of the artwork to create new structures and ways of apprehending reality, nor for the structuring mechanisms of the artworld and its market to re-imagine themselves – what Chatterton earlier described as productive moments of resistance. This research thus takes a considered view of both material and symbolic worlds and applies Barad's diffraction to generate new insights and possibilities in their imbrication that correspond to Coole's "capacious historical materialism" (2013).

Indeed, Bourdieu's sociological work is sometimes interpreted as hostile to aesthetics. The aesthetic in Bourdieu's view does not exist except as a concept that continues to be used to perpetuate a form of symbolic violence (Brown & Szeman, 2000: 4). Here, this research deviates in favour of a more relational aesthetics that certainly has symbolic power, including the potential for violence, but also performs a redemptive desire for an expanded sense of the world and perhaps even a conviviality. This relates back to art's relationship with the everyday and what John Dewey calls the continuity of esthetic [sic] experience with normal processes of living, "going back to experience of the common or mill run of things to discover the esthetic quality such experience possesses" (2017: 39). Dewey says, perhaps too reductively, that the art product expresses the full meaning of ordinary experience "as dyes that come out of coal tar products when they receive special treatment". This research inquiry started out by following artworks to seek nodes of value transfiguration and their catalysts; it found a complex constellation of implicated forces, dynamics and processes. This manifested in the way artists inhabited their circumstances and how this habitation in turn was carried forward in their artworks (artistic thinking) and in the way collectors

structured formal strategies in processes of valuation (structural thinking), as Chapters 4 and 5 will make clear. Interestingly enough, Bourdieu speaks of ‘slow thinking’, which produces something ‘fast thinking’ cannot; it is the autonomy of the field that permits this slow thinking to occur and enables it to be properly consecrated when its end-product is finally achieved (Brown & Szeman, 2000: 7). The synthesis of Chapter 6 brings together artistic and structural thinking to reconsider the possibilities that the studio and the collection might offer each other in fashioning a more sustainable artworld ecosystem.

Brown & Szeman (2000: 3) think the hostility to aesthetics cued above may in fact be a longstanding point of refusal that is not directed specifically towards Bourdieu but rather to the sociological study of art and culture in general. This is because sociology works against any mystical notion of art-making and views it as situated and produced. The same authors feel this tension can be productive. My research inquiry shares with Bourdieu the idea that artworks are produced and consumed in a very particular context which enables and informs their meaning. But it also reserves for the artwork a certain authority or agency, which helps make possible its exhibition in white-cube environments, for instance, that often carry no readily available contextual information. It is part of the artist’s skill to distil complex affects into visual form that renders them communicable beyond the studio door when the context of material production is absent.

This is the kind of quality that Suely Rolnik has termed “entorno” (a Portuguese word meaning both ‘overflowing’ and ‘environment’), with which I concur. In her text, Rolnik evocatively describes the powerful affect of viewing an art installation by Cildo Meireles, *Red Shift* (1967-84), describing how a sense of pervasive oppression becomes visible and audible in this immersive artwork as artistic commentary on the voluntary blindness and deafness induced by the brutality of a dictatorship regime (Rolnik, 2010: 38). Rolnik calls this intensive dimension a field of forces that is actualised in the work itself (2010: 36). “The more precise the form, the stronger the pulse of its intensive quality and the greater its power to insert itself in its surroundings (entorno)” (Rolnik, 2010: 40).

This same agency of the artwork was described earlier by Bourdieu as understanding works of art as a *manifestation* of the field as a whole (1993). The corroding forces of

money are plainly evident in art's financialisation, which the global financial crisis of 2007-08 precipitated, but it is also possible for artists to play around with those very same structures to subvert and even leverage them for artistic purpose (see Chapter 6). In any event, the poles of art and money Bourdieu sets out are in reality imbricated to differing degrees; the sale of August House demonstrated as much. More deeply, the related challenge is to both reinforce art production and re-imagine operating structures, and the findings of this thesis take on some re-imaginative work for this kind of diffraction.

These are the “border crossings” Schneider & Wright (2006) refer to in their collation of dialogues between contemporary art and anthropology. Their aim in exploring such overlaps is to encourage “fertile collaborations and the development of alternative shared strategies of *practice* on both sides of the border (Schneider & Wright, 2006: 1), or how anthropologists can engage with artists' work, and artists explore the relevance of anthropology for contemporary practice. Despite their differences, the authors say there are productive affinities, and that anthropology's iconophobia needs to be overcome by a critical engagement with a range of material and sensual practices in contemporary art (Schneider & Wright, 2006: 4). Their edited volume calls for productive connections between theory and practice to move beyond aesthetics as an object of study, or visuals as illustrative, to become an actively explored constituent of visual anthropology practice. They are concerned with developing new practices that draw on both disciplines but the challenge is to move beyond art as an object of enquiry “without realizing the epistemological potential or critical implications that contemporary art practices have for anthropological representation ... art is no longer seen as an autonomous realm but is firmly embedded in cultural and historical specifics” (Schneider & Wright, 2006: 18). This politics of representation was the recent subject of an artistic intervention at the University of Cape Town library that highlights the dangers of objectification and the symbolic violence cited earlier. A sculpture by Willie Bester of Sarah Baartman, who was exhibited in 19th century Europe as a freak show attraction, was covered by students with cloth and placards to protest the appropriation of the black female body, and to draw attention to the sculpture's positioning just before the science and engineering literatures. “It is not just a sculpture; it is not just a piece of cloth – it is centuries of trauma,” stated one placard. “The prerogative of *looking* but not *being seen* characterises imperialist power,” stated another.

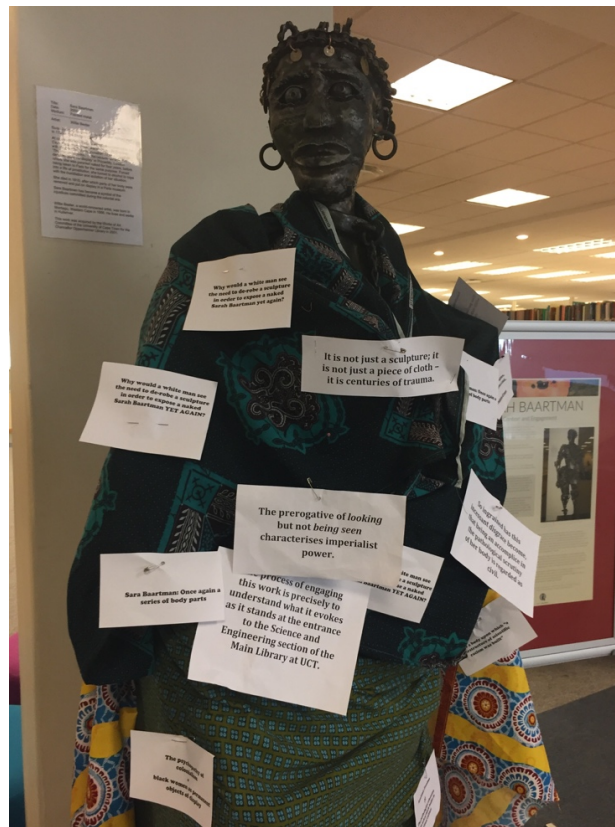


Fig. 27: Willie Bester's sculpture of Sarah Baartman at UCT, covered in protest cards and cloth.

Much recent work in such border crossings is from the direction of anthropology towards contemporary art. A recent reader by Bakke and Peterson (2017) draws together classic anthropological work with new studies by anthropologists on arts around the world and across mediums (2017: 1), “less concerned with individual works of art than with an analysis of the artfully made world – be this textual, sonic, kinesthetic, olfactory, or material”. The aesthetics, affordances and situatedness of artworks move towards considerations of art’s materiality, social effects and processes entailed in making and engaging with art (Bakke & Peterson, 2017: 2). Such moves are welcome and the idea of theory as emergent: “art is a social force, claiming that art works upon – not only within – the cultural contexts in which it is made, engaged and made meaningful” (2017: 2). The same volume also considers intersections and collisions between anthropology and the arts, suggesting deep entanglements that also afford possibilities for “inchoate, nonsensical and surreal work” (2017: 7).

However, my own approach is in the other direction: taking very specific artworks within a fine art context and borrowing from anthropology to move outwards from the studio context, stressing in this orientation artistic matter, process and technologies as starting points for new knowledge. Embedded within a very particular building, these border crossings also draw inspiration from texts that link architectural form and interiority. These include Suzanne Hall (2012) in her ethnographic mapping of the interior world represented along a London street, and Caroline Knowles (2014) in her biography of a flip-flop along globalisation's back roads. The latter deftly engages the broader global flows and circuits along which an object travels and illuminates the entangled and surprising relationships along the way. My own experiment follows the trails of contemporary art; this literature review offers a way to both understand observations and provoke new questions.

In extending this dialogue across modalities of value and valuation represented by the studio and the collection, an holistic framework of value conceived by Jean Baudrillard (1990) becomes useful. He initially proposed a tripartite account: a natural stage (use-value), a commodity stage (exchange-value) and structural stage (sign-value). The first had a natural referent; the second developed with reference to a commodity; the third with a set of models (Baudrillard, 1990: 5). He then added a fourth, a fractal stage (viral or radiant), which was the power of the hyper-real. This final stage, he wrote, had no equivalence; it was a sort of "epidemic of value, a general metastasis of value, a haphazard proliferation and dispersal of value" (Baudrillard, 1990: 6). The studio could be understood as the natural stage, of a kind of intrinsic value; the artwork's accession into a collection as the commodity stage, when it is externally valuated; entering the public domain, for example on exhibition, can be understood as the structural stage as exhibitions in particular non-commercial museum shows validate the work through artworld machinations; while the auction is an example of the fractal stage with its notion of viral value. Baudrillard said there were two art markets today – one regulated by a hierarchy of values and the other floating capital, "pure speculation, movement for movement's sake ... much in common with poker or potlatch" (1990: 21). The synthesis of Chapter 6 returns to this terrain and the contentious form of the derivative as an embodiment of such speculation. The thesis now turns in the next two chapters to the respective case studies, engaging with the research specifics and analysis.

Chapter 4: The studio

“When we talk about the value of arts and culture, we should always start with the intrinsic – how arts and culture illuminate our inner lives and enrich our emotional world. This is what we cherish” (Mowlah et al., 2014: 4).



Figs. 28-30: (Left to right) Buthelezi's former studio site in Melville, demolished; Buthelezi's August House studio (2014); temporary studio relocation to Maboneng (2015) en route to nearby Selby.

4.1. Prelude

Back from the grave. This impossible piece of graffiti, drawn at rooftop level on a building several storeys high, sat adjacent to a major road near the Nelson Mandela Bridge in Braamfontein, en route to Johannesburg inner city. Another artist revealed the significance of the words to me. The tag was created by a graffiti writer everyone thought had disappeared, announcing his re-emergence. This case study has a similar spirit. The research captured an atelier just before it disbanded and observed how it resurfaced in a new diaspora. It did so by tracking artworks in the making, and also taking note of where they went. This approach was informed by a method already described, to follow the things themselves and let the artwork lead the way. Along these journeys, the research sought nodes of value transfiguration and their catalysts. The central focus on the studio context was to understand different notions of intrinsic artistic value before the artwork's reification – simply put, how an artwork becomes matter. It was hoped such an investigation would in turn tell a larger story about what made August House 'august' – venerable, impressive – and hence why the atelier mattered. It was unclear at the outset where such an inquiry would lead since the making of art is a process of contingency, and arts-based methodology is necessarily open to contingent forces.

As it happened, the surprise disruptor and most significant catalyst was the atelier's revaluation. When August House was put up for sale in late 2013, just after the start

of the research period, a shared sense of precarity in working conditions preoccupied the tenants who all had to make plans for relocation. They had various coping strategies, reflected in their practice, and these ultimately led to self-organised collective solutions, expanded upon in Chapter 6. I understood those solutions as demonstrating artistic thinking, the key learning from this case study.

I drew upon the Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant and his strategies of language and resistance (Britton, 1999) to better appreciate what this thinking comprised – in particular his concept of detour, “an indirect mode of resistance which is tactical and ambiguous as it arises as a response to a situation of disguised repression” (Sourieau, 2000: 1211). The ruse, both expressing and hiding meaning, is an example of this concept. The artworks were all carriers of the same. Further, their journeys performed Glissant’s notion of diaspora, or moving from singularity to multiplicity, as these linear lines of inquiry became a web of interconnections instead. The sale of the atelier surfaced hidden links between space and imagination. Those linkages were evident in the tracked artworks and the imbricated relationships the artists articulated with their immediate environs.

Following the making of a thing allows for points of connection to be developed between theory and practice. Artist Beth Coleman, speaking at a Wits School of Arts symposium on art research, articulated this relationship when she told delegates you do not know those points of connection unless you have been on the floor connecting the cables (2017, author’s notes). Practitioner knowledge and awareness helps to make particular kinds of insights possible. It was my privilege in this case study to follow four artists on their floors, connecting their cables. Each worked in a different medium and towards variable ends but they shared the keen sense of discipline that Thornton described in her own series of studio visits. Their cables connected up a circuit of knowledge.

Whether or not there is something singular about this circuit of knowledge is the subject of debate. Sarat Maharaj (2009) puts this question forward in his paper about visual research, *Know-How and No-How*, and expanded on his thinking at the same Wits symposium. He described visual knowledge as a sapid way of knowing, “aromatic, flesh and blood, embodied, enacted and performative” (2017, author’s notes). He said it was at the opposite end of the spectrum to the crystalline age of

smartware which determined our everyday reality – an algorithmic form of thinking with a beauty of its own. His related concern was how to deal with the visual as a productive form rather than secondary and elucidated only through language. “Art research should not become [an] entirely discursive and documented activity, not be reduced entirely to the textual, or it becomes an activity in the service of academicisation, and the ‘know-how’ it’s involved with is too much ‘in the know’” (Maharaj, 2017). He also addressed the tendency to be overstuffed with knowledge and recommended inducing a state of ‘not-knowing’ that was open to experience and creation. Ultimately, there was a waywardness to the visual that was beyond translation, “the glutinous force of the un-nameable”. Suely Rolnik describes the artist as operating between two planes – on the one hand, a cartography of visible and speakable reality like conflicts of class, race, religion, gender; and on the other a diagram of sensible reality, invisible and unspeakable: a domain of fluxes, intensities and becomings (Rolnik, 2010: 39).

New knowledge arises from a place of ‘not knowing’ and the studio is perhaps emblematic. This capacity is eloquently expressed by William Kentridge, one of South Africa’s key contemporary artists whose own studio is near August House, in Maboneng. Kentridge described his practice in a public lecture as a delight in discovering a power to remake the world rather than something already known, letting the medium lead and giving oneself over to what it provoked. He called life in the studio “a series of irrational activities followed with as much assiduity as possible”, where the making could jump ahead of the thinking (Kentridge, 2013). The literal circling of the artist’s studio was a safe space for inauthentic starting points, he added, where images and ideas could clarify themselves in action rather than be worked out in advance; “through cacophony of excess and uncertainty and indecision we arrive at meaning or invite the viewer to do so, or contemplate the impossibility of so doing” (Kentridge, 2013). He also invoked a limbo of understanding – sometimes, a failure of understanding was the correct understanding; gaps and non-sequiturs allowed the work to emerge, where “saying badly” could give permission for the new. Four years later, Kentridge went on to launch an interdisciplinary institution built on this very notion – *The Centre for the Less Good Idea*.

In the ensuing observations there are parallels with how the August House artists turned indeterminacy into new structures and forms. This artistic thinking – otherwise

called visual knowing (Sullivan, 2005) or visual thinking (Arnheim, 1969) – was identified as the key intrinsic value. Visual perception, says Arnheim, lays the groundwork of concept formation and the grasping of generalities, and hence art has a central function in general education: “The most effective training of perceptual thinking can be offered in the art studio ... [The artist] is accustomed to visualizing complexity and to conceiving of phenomena and problems in visual terms” (1969: 296).

How might such perceptual thinking be tracked? Passing through London in late 2016, I spent some days immersed in the library at the London School of Economics (LSE). Exiting, with the intention of visiting the British Museum’s *South African Art Now* exhibition, I passed by the Short Loans stack. Curious about what texts urban scholars at LSE might be assigned, I browsed the relevant aisle for cultural geography material. There, wedged among topics from the cultures of money to material geographies, was a tiny book swamped by its peers. This edition was dated 1969 and quite aptly titled *The Hidden Dimension*. Its author, Edward T. Hall, wrote about space in terms of physical space – this included cities, and some dated passages about cultural and ethnic distinctions. But what deferred a date with the British Museum was 14 pages embedded in the middle of the book, titled *Art as a Clue to Perception*.

Hall’s main point was that an appreciation of art helped people see and perceive space better; that an understanding of art was the hidden dimension to understanding what was going on. Hall encouraged the reader to view and review art and develop a personal relationship with it. He wrote that “man [sic] has inhabited many different perceptual worlds and ... art constitutes one of the many rich sources of data on human perception” (Hall, 1969: 90). Notably, this involved the structure of those perceptual worlds. In a section, *The Language of Space*, Hall referred to literature to explore the relationship of content to structure. He said writers, like painters, were often concerned with space: “The question I asked myself was whether one could use literary texts as data rather than simply as descriptions” (Hall, 1969: 94). In this question, Hall pre-empted the domain of artistic research where artistic texts (artefacts) can be data. Further, in *The Hidden Dimension*, he suggested self-consciously identifying the crucial components of the message the author provided the reader, to build up the reader’s own sensations of space. Likewise, in the trailing of artworks within August House studios, artworks conveyed a sensation of space

with messages provided to viewers. Further, the changing spatial circumstances of their production impacted upon the artwork trajectories and those of their makers, making various linkages between space and imagination more explicit.

Works of art are embodied meanings, according to Danto (2013: 149); thus they are carriers of insight. As this research unfolds, it will show how artworks acted as vectors of value, or conduits of meaning, in their migrations from the studio into the networked artworld of the second case study. Studios, as Lane Relyea (2012: 222) put it, are ways to show up within this network. Both studio and museum, or place of exhibition, are superseded by more temporal, transient events, spaces of fluid interchange between object, activities and people with interlocking functions, Relyea adds. The studio, art school or international exhibition each have their own scale and modality, to create a system that is in fact more like a network than the enclosures or limits Buren described. Relyea's network privileges itinerancy and circulation over fixity, diminishes hierarchies and boundaries in favour of mobility, and flexibility across a more open and extensive environment (Relyea, 2012: 222). Both objects and subjects thus become more mobile, integrating into a diffuse ecology and dispersed artworld, "not only making art but also putting on shows, publishing, organising events, teaching, networking, maybe belonging to one or more semi-collectives, even adopting one or more pseudonyms" (Relyea, 2012: 222). This diffused and nomadic nature of the artwork and its ecosystem is central to thesis findings. The research observed Khumalo's "messed nest", how the nest rebuilt itself, and where its birds migrated.

4.2. Case: August House

August House (b. 1946) was a former textiles factory that in its earlier life formed part of the property portfolio of Sam Keidan, an immigrant from Palestine whose business focused upon Johannesburg industrial sectors. The building's name may in fact be prosaic, according to its long-serving property manager Adrian Myers, derived from the month of its original registration. August House was initially home to dress manufacturers that occupied two floors, and subsequently a textiles manufacturer has always been present as a tenant – first Comage, a cut-and-trim business that downsized over time, and later an embroidery firm. The building has changed physical shape since its earlier days. There used to be chutes to get goods in and out,

and there was initially no parking, which currently occupies the basement level. In 2006, the building was renovated into an atelier, led by Bié Venter. She bought into the shareholding company, August House Properties, with a business partner, Maria Svane. For almost a decade following this conversion, the building hosted artists working and sometimes also living in the building's independent studios reconfigured to prioritise space and light.



Fig. 31: “We all have to pack”. Graffiti inside the August House lift.

August House comprises four floors plus a basement parking level and a rooftop. Its inner-city location is a working-class manufacturing area called Doornfontein. Light industrial buildings dominate the precinct behind, with a small church wedged inbetween. Doornfontein was affected by decentralisation from the 1960s when the stock exchange and key corporates moved out to securitised northern suburbs. But this capital flight also provided vacated buildings for new residents to occupy albeit the buildings were often poorly maintained and in disrepair. Next door is Jeppestown, a mixed-use area attracting varied responses to urban redevelopment. This includes a recently created precinct called Maboneng, catering to a more gentrified creative class just a few streets away but in another socio-economic world. Doornfontein is a

working-class neighbourhood with about one quarter of the population migrants making a new life in Johannesburg (see p.52).

The inscrutable exterior of August House belied its interior of working studios and the atelier as a whole held a distinctive place in the South African artworld. Some of South Africa's best-known artists worked there or passed through during its first incarnation as an atelier, alongside emergent talents in a constant rotation of artist-residents. The building also hosted a mix of other tenants including manufacturers, a lawyer, musicians, film-makers, and fashion designers. A trucking business, Best Movers, ran a commuting shuttle from outside August House and long-distance buses operated from down the road.

This era came to an end in late 2013 when the building was put up for sale by its shareholders and all the tenants had to relocate. Over almost one decade, August House went from a former textiles factory valued at about R2 million in 2006 to R11 million when it finally sold onwards as an atelier in April 2015. This increased value was largely due to the fact that it became an artist's kind of building, as Venter put it. The selfsame artists could not participate in this capital gain, however, as they were tenants and not owners, and the thesis findings will return to this domain. The 18-month research period covered the period of this hiatus during the building's sale period; it came to an end when the building finally changed hands, majority vacant.

The delay in the sale was due to the failure of prior bids to turn the building into low-cost residential property, in large part because of a distressed neighbouring building located opposite and the related difficulty for interested buyers of raising the requisite funds. The neighbouring 'bad building', in local parlance, without basic services and in a derelict state, was squatted by tenants with nowhere better to go. Their improvised solutions to everything including illegal electricity hookups was clearly visible from August House. Dubbed 'Badge Creations'²⁶ from the advertising signage on its facade, the neighbour offered itself as an index of realities in the immediate neighbourhood and was described by one August House tenant as "a very angry building". It changed over time, in structure and purpose, demonstrating broader

²⁶ In fact, Badge Creations was a business that used to operate from inside August House. Its logo was erected on the neighbouring building for better visibility. Badge Creations moved out of August House prior to its conversion into an atelier and its signage remained behind.

shifts in the immediate environment. Development of overlooked inner-city buildings in nearby precincts increasingly encroached upon Doornfontein during the research period, exemplified by Maboneng a few blocks away, and it seemed inevitable that End Street, where August House was located, would eventually have its turn.

Developers with a view to residential conversion of August House were put off by the hijacked neighbour but the eventual buyers saw things differently.²⁷ They regarded the situation as an opportunity because it discounted the real value of August House (Alon Kinkel, personal interview, 2015). David Mayers, who eventually bought August House in April 2015, was in fact introduced to the building through viewing the work of resident artist Nelson Makamo. Mayers was the National Asset Manager of Arrowhead Properties at the time, and fortuitously also an art collector. He went on to set up his own company, Quorum Property Group, which bought August House. Alon Kinkel, another collector working primarily in the diamond business, brought Mayers and Makamo together in Makamo's studio for an art viewing.²⁸ Kinkel had also originally found August House while coming to view other artwork for acquisition, making his own way from his nearby President Street office. In the end, he facilitated the building's sale to Mayers. The new buyer, however, kept the building functioning as an atelier and brought artistic tenants back in. "We looked at it [and thought] the building has got such history. Perhaps the best thing is to try reignite what was once there" (Mayers, personal interview, 2016). "The building had grown organically and taken on a life of its own. The best strategy was to channel energy to get artists back."

The research period formally concludes when the building is sold but some observations following the sale are relevant. After a successful acquisition in 2015, Mayers' company Quorum entered into a co-operative agreement with Propertuity, the company that developed Maboneng, to take advantage of "synergies" in their respective inner-city holdings but said this did not extend to ownership of August House.²⁹ Propertuity was involved in the strategic direction going forward but was not a shareholder, Mayers said at the time of acquisition. "We have zero desire or

²⁷ 'Hijacked' refers to residential buildings whose management and rent collection is taken over by opportunists.

²⁸ In February 2019, a painting by Nelson Makamo was on the front cover of *Time* magazine for its Optimists issue, guest edited by filmmaker Ava DuVernay.

²⁹ Incidentally, during the research period, a fund bought a third of Propertuity and injected long-term capital into the real estate developer to fuel expansion plans. This turn of events connects to the second case study, which includes a fund structure, and Chapter 5 picks up this narrative thread.

ambition to turn August House into anything other than what it is. We are letting it continue, to keep going.” New August House tenants were subsequently enrolled under revised terms, starting with rental. Management took a more active and vested interest than its predecessor, organising open studio days, publishing a website and social media presence, and marketing the building as an artistic entity. Changes also included a gallery and plans for a residency space. Some of the new artists appeared to work in a more collaborative and interactive way. August House was no longer open to the public on a casual basis – an electric gate replaced a caretaker’s position (p.90 refers). In other respects, the building appeared physically the same.

Soon after August House changed hands, the neighbouring Badge Creations was also bought by a different property developer who turned it into low-income housing. The site was fenced off by *Immaculate Painters and Renovators* who transformed it inside and out. Like August House, Badge Creations was also a former factory building, hosting Perkins Carpets in its heyday. Both August House and the neighbouring Badge Creations thus began second lives. This reflects a recurrent theme of endings and beginnings that became neverendings. This spiral defied a definitive point of origin and closure, a circular form returning upon itself to fuse ideas of now and then, and to build what Douglas Coupland has called the ‘superfuture’ or extreme present. He wrote: “Somewhere in the past few years the present melted into the future. We’re now living inside the future 24/7 and this (weirdly electric and buzzy) sensation shows no sign of stopping – if anything, it grows ever more intense ... In this superfuture, I feel like I’m clamped into a temporal rollercoaster and, at the crest of the first hill, I can see that my rollercoaster actually runs off far into the horizon. Wait! How is this thing supposed to end?” (Coupland, 2016).

The location of End Street was a misnomer in this case study. There was no discernible end, as one of the artists Daniel Stompie Selibe put it, it was “a continuous song moving to many journeys in life” (personal interview, 2015). The story of August House was full of hyperlinks and following these interconnected trails formed a web far more coherent and resilient than at first appeared. In this web, origin and destination point looped back on themselves to elliptically recalibrate the present, as the artwork trajectories later in this chapter will make evident. By way of example, Gordon Froud’s artwork *Cone Virus*, which is detailed below, starts life on the August House rooftop where there is enough room for him to create these large-scale

sculptural installations. As chance would have it, the very final artwork the research maps in this series is commissioned by Propertuity following its acquisition of the building: a *Cone Virus* installation for the August House rooftop.

Such imbricated storylines often meant surprising results that let in the unexpected – like confounding the odds when the building re-invented itself again as an atelier instead of being developed into residential units. Other neverendings were cued by objects in the passageways or middle space of August House during its transition period – the ghostings flagged earlier. For instance, artefacts left behind in the building by a luthier when he moved workshops took on a second life. A set of violin casts pinned to the wall on a landing by former tenant, Svend Christensen, who makes violins and bows, accrued some scratched-out graffiti on its plaster skin and one dropped to the floor and then disappeared. Christensen's presence still remained in the building, however, in the form of various other instruments including two defunct pianos he gifted me when he left. When I too departed August House, I in turn passed these pianos on to Gordon Froud. He transformed them with his assistant, Honest Ngwenya, into a truncated artwork, *Tribute to Gabriel Orozco*. That artwork then travelled countrywide on exhibition. The second piano was in turn gifted to BLK JKS, a rock group who used to practise at August House and were intent on restoring the defunct piano back to a playable life.

Neverendings in the form of second lives were also lived through new artistic collectives in nearby buildings that were birthed from the August House diaspora. These included Ellis House, where the art transport company, Fine Art Logistics, had already relocated some time before the atelier's sale, and where other August House diaspora like Dorothee Kreutzfeldt took a new studio. She also held a solo exhibition at Ellis House, *Here We*, shortly after relocating, which included objects, sound and moving images that referenced the August House closure and relocation. Nugget Square in nearby City and Suburban became a hub when Froud moved there and other artists followed. Selby was also a popular choice, a nearby industrial area, and Selibe soon created a new studio collective there with a number of other artists. They included former August House tenant Vusi Mfupi and, for a time, Mary Sibande.



Fig. 32: Roll call of August House tenants (2006-2014) from 'At the End of August' (2014), a goodbye event for the building organised by departing artists. Image courtesy of Dorothee Kreutzfeldt.

Various other life events in August House during the research period also conveyed this theme. An advocate, a tenant of August House who occasionally made his way on foot to the High Court on Pritchard Street for legal representations, was dying of terminal cancer. Robin Stransham-Ford argued in the Pretoria High Court for the right to end his own life. Stransham-Ford won, and the groundbreaking judgement was delivered only hours after he passed away. The judgement was therefore later rescinded because the court found it could not apply to a deceased person. Nonetheless, his challenge significantly shifted the country's legal territory. In a related twist of fate, a fundraising auction for the Stransham-Ford estate included a work created by August House artist Mbongeni Buthelezi. Parallel to this judicial process by Stransham-Ford, August House was emptying of its tenants while its owners sought a buyer. Only two artists stayed on during this transition; one of them, Diane Victor, did not move anywhere because she was battling kidney failure and during this time underwent a successful transplant. When I visited her post-operation in her same August House studio, she recounted her experience of visiting Badge Creations next door and was working it into a series of etchings. Directly outside Victor's studio door, a small storeroom with open gratings revealed the stashed legal files of Stransham-Ford.

Another storyline of conflated beginnings and endings comprised the building's two caretakers. Arriving at End Street and entering August House, Power Mazibuko and Gibson Khumalo were the sentinels. As caretakers, they were the primary architects of the protective veil that seemed to shroud the building. In reality, this veil comprised a network of interrelationships which the duo cultivated from their respective portals – Mazibuko seated at the driveway entrance to the basement on his makeshift chair and Khumalo in his glass-walled office alongside the pedestrian entrance doors. Mazibuko and Khumalo stitched the building into its surrounding urban fabric. Mazibuko had worked at August House since 1981. He had a dream of one day being self-sufficient – owning a tractor and making bricks for a living in Botswana, where his family resided. But he lost his caretaking job with the new management company of August House in the ructions of the sale, and had to move on. With his termination payment from his previous employers, Mazibuko bought a truck from fellow tenants Best Movers. Khumalo, who kept his job, passed away the following year (2016) reportedly from heart failure, aged 48. Like Mazibuko, Khumalo helped to make August House a home for the many tenants who passed through. The next section begins with his story.

a) A caretaker's view



Fig. 33: Gibson Khumalo at his August House office. Photo: Anthea Pokroy.

Gibson Mabutho Khumalo, one of the building's two caretakers, sat for our first interview inside his glass-walled office at the pedestrian entrance of August House in February 2014. At this time, a buyer had not yet been found and the future fate of the building was unclear. In the end, Khumalo kept his job with the new management company. But the year following the sale, he passed away. This is the truncated view of his life at August House.

GK: "I came to Johannesburg in 1992, from Pietersburg³⁰. Everyone thinks maybe in the city is where you can make a living and get a job so that you can support the family. I came to find a job. Home for me is Seshego, a small village in Pietersburg. If I have enough money, I usually go twice in a month [to see my family]. I was in different places in Johannesburg before coming to August House but not very meaningful jobs. Then I got a permanent job here. I started here in 1997. Before it used to be clothing factories. The furniture factory was on the ground floor, where the truckers are now. The first floor is still a clothing factory [Comage]. When it used to be mostly factories, there were people during working hours and after they left, it became something else. But now, since there are people living here, the artists, it becomes like a home. Most of them I took them as part of my family. I used most of my spare time to visit some of them, maybe we share something like playing pool. If there are events [in the building], it made me meet more people. They were good people. I considered myself as having warm people around me.

"My day starts like seven o'clock. From seven maybe I start cleaning the building itself. I usually subdivide it – I clean a section, say two floors a day, it could take me two to three hours. After that, maybe I can take a break. Maybe I take another staircase that day. Towards 12, I break there and come to sit here [in the front office] as part of the job like a security man so people don't just come in and out. It is part of the job until maybe four o'clock and the day ends there. But still I will be part of the building. With these artists staying here, maybe at times the building cuts out of electricity, they will call me. Not working as such but still part of the building. They need my help all the time,

³⁰ Now Polokwane, the capital of Limpopo province.

all the time. It is not difficult but if you don't have patience, you can't sit till four o'clock.

“Often I used to visit Mbongeni [Buthelezi]. He is a friend. He always offers me time to be with him. Although I could not even maybe understand when he does that heating of plastic with the flame gun to melt it. I realise that it makes [laughs] professionalism there. Because otherwise you would struggle for the whole day trying. That's when I realised: some things, you can take it [to be] easy on the eye but actually doing it, it's different. But I found his art quite interesting. When he told me how it all starts, right from the [plastic scraps] outside, he explained to me that it's not making a living to himself only, he is contributing to the environment because most of these plastics that he collects – you can imagine if that thing is just thrown away or littering the street. But instead he makes this recycling for a living too. I found his art quite interesting. You can find him making huge images of people. All in all you could just consider it as something that is useless but as such very useful to him.

“I was used to these people as part of my family. Some of them used to support me here and there. Now I find it very different. If the situation gets tougher, I don't know who now to look to. I don't know how to put it in good English but the people here were very very good to me. It is like someone has just thrown a mess into the bird's nest so all these birds now have moved out of the nest. So I am left alone in the building. And I don't know [about] the other situation what will come. We hear they are going to make flats. I don't know the characters of the people who will come here. Whoever I would visit [at August House], I was welcome and would find a peace of mind. It is a wait-and-see. We are just hanging there; that thing haunts me quite a lot. It haunts me quite a lot.

“All in all, I can say, from the time I started to work here at August House in the area around it was very busy. It used to be mostly factories around here. The movement counted a lot, in the late 1990s you could see the movement of people going – trains, taxis – until the factories started moving out of the city. You could see the movement of the people subduing. After 2005, it

started to come down a little bit and we could see a bit of loneliness. Some people did come to these abandoned factories to make living spaces, some were formal, some were informal like this building next door [Badge Creations]. It used to be a very very nice factory – you could see yourself glittering there. There were union offices. By 2010, we started to realise with this [neighbouring] building there is something wrong. It's very bad – you could fear to go out after seven unlike before when this area was peaceful. If they buy [August House], they couldn't consider living right next to this in terms of hygiene and crime. So maybe their buying of the building would be an advantage for the environment also to be fixed because the owners of the building will not be happy to be next to it. So I think it will also bring a change. This area is very dangerous at night ... You could hear stories of children being raped, being killed and it's about this environment. Moreover, for a child in the building there is no open space for them and that also makes me uncomfortable.

“Work in general is very important – what you do with your days and how you do it. You can't just sit ... from morning to sunset and expect life out of that. If you are employed or self-employed to make a living, what matters most is what you are doing.”

– Gibson Khumalo (personal interview, 2015)

b) A former tenant's view

I first met Svend Christensen, a luthier who makes and repairs stringed instruments, in 2010 in his August House workshop two floors beneath my own. A glass-fronted piano standing just inside his doors enticed me inside. In addition to violins, it turned out he was tinkering on a haul of defunct pianos as a side hobby and the glass-fronted one was given new life after falling off the back of a pickup. Christensen was an August House tenant from 2009 for over two years before moving to nearby Kensington, where he built his own bespoke workshop at his home. We met at the nearby Troyeville Hotel, slow jazz playing in the background, to talk about the ups and downs of working at August House.

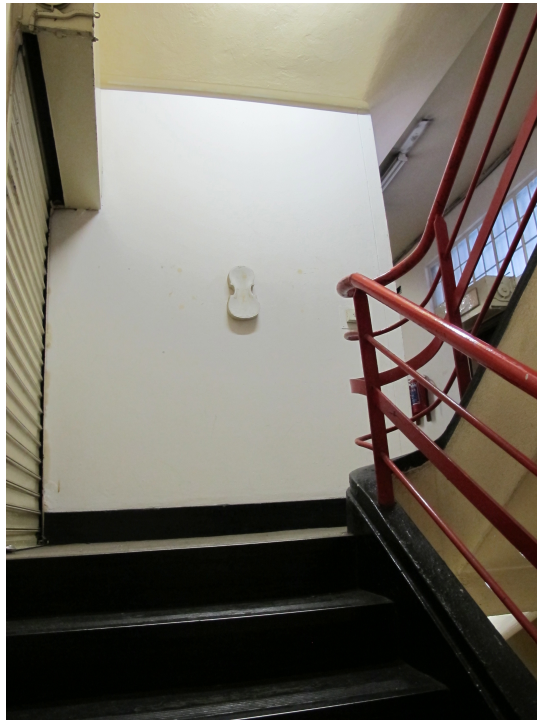


Fig. 34: Svend Christensen's violin cast, a leftover from his former workshop still hanging on an August House stairwell.

SC: "I needed to consolidate my work and new ideas. I had them dispersed. I needed space to be able to execute my bigger vision. And then I got August House and it was double the space that I needed. I think it was a by-chance thing; I was looking for space and found one that was also a whole lot cheaper down here in Doornfontein by the stadium. But there was one particularly grave problem there. Right next door they were doing electroplating ... you could see there was acid seepage through the bottom of the wall, and it was rising. So I continued looking, continued looking, continued looking. And then, somewhere along the line I bumped into Bié [Venter].

"It was a complete disaster in terms of how it looked when we first saw it. [The previous tenants] left behind a two-month cleaning job. And then I had to make it comfortable for clients. Lots and lots of work. A year later I was just getting it to a point when it was starting to feel like something nice, but then the cost of all these people [staff] ... By the time I had dished out a small percentage to everyone, there was 10 per cent left for me. But it was working. I think if I had another year, I would have been able to turn it into a sustainable project. The rent was fine but then you add all the costs. The

equation was wrong ... I had a dangerous mix of fatigue that I have never had in my life before.

“Another problem with August House was positioning. I had to pay for additional parking [bays] so clients could use them, as they were not willing to park on the street. And I lost some work because of its situation. As soon as I mentioned ‘End Street Johannesburg’, it was ‘Oh no sorry I’ll meet you in Sandton’. And I’m quite sensitive to smell – that endless urine smell. You open the window to get fresh air and you get fresh urine. Urgh. I had a couple of experiences where I had to work through the night. At night, it sounds a bit like a horror movie where the ghouls come out and start chewing people alive ... I’ve heard there are lots of new things that are planned and going to happen there; they just weren’t happening while I was there. In terms of challenges, there were lots. The space was so big and so empty so when musicians came I can’t hear. You play the sound, it shoots right past me, goes back and hits the wall and while I’m listening to the new one, the old one comes and crashes in my ears. So I would go to my house and do it there. Suddenly I’m working between two places to try and achieve one thing. But a lot of the artists came just to have a sniff and a look around.

“While you are trying to wrap your head around something that you are busy with, all these other artistic things are happening around you. So suddenly your inspiration can come from other artists – through seeing something, talking to them, just sharing the space, just the physical energy. Kensington is calmer. Ideally in another year, the studio and house, will be beautiful. But August House, what I learnt there, you can’t learn at any institution on earth ... I asked [a friend]: when will I be rich? He said ‘God, you are already super-rich!’ Did I miss something? ‘Yes. You have the ability to go and create things for yourself. You have got the initiative to do stuff.’

“After all the things I learnt at August House ... It wasn’t until then that I really understood the real costs behind doing this. Rent. Lunch. But next to lunch I must remember if I’m driving for it, then petrol. And a portion for tyres and licensing. How detailed can you get. But it’s all money. Life and reality ... Reality is way behind. Where I started off, having used these paws to

make stuff my entire life, and then fine art, and sculpture as the major, coming into violin life was almost easy. The hard part was connecting the relationship. This has caused me introspection beyond belief ... I ended up with finesse. With high speed, all attention to detail goes down the toilet.

“Those artists sitting at August House working there, when they are going to have an exhibition, I’m sure some of them have a gallery or curator or someone behind them pushing them into – ‘these are your prices’. But when they sell something off the shop floor in the workshop because they need some change for the weekend, are they being realistic about that price? Are they saying okay, I have to pay three grand [thousand rand] for my room, lights, all of these things. So my artwork cost is X, profit, plus goodwill and all the other stuff on top. Okay, I need R6,000. No, they say R1,200. Boom. In terms of how many hours it took to pay for that space, it’s already too little. One almost has to be an actuary [to work it out], you need to be taught.”
– Svend Christensen (personal interview, 2014)

4.3. Tracked artworks

a) *Nobuhle, Beauty Queen: Floor 1*

Mbongeni Buthelezi, a well-established painter, is a magnanimous person and easy conversationalist, welcoming, generous with his skills and time. His head is neatly shaven, his build slight. His hands are pockmarked from his distinctive method of painting: melting plastic scraps with a heatgun onto specially prepared canvases that can withstand the flame. About 20 defunct heatguns lined his August House studio windowsill, marking the time he first started painting this way back in 1991.

Buthelezi was born in Springs, has two daughters and lives in Krugersdorp but still regards himself as a Sowetan. He got his first studio in Newtown around 2002, which he called a turning point in his life, “to have the confidence and the guts to say – look, I think it’s time to get a space to go there, and do what I believe in. For me it was a very big step towards taking myself into the future ... As an artist, without a studio you are homeless. This is where I manage to sit down and try to think: where am I?” (personal interview, 2014). That spell ended when coffee shops and small colleges

moved in and he relocated to Auckland Park – the site of a former laundromat that was in turn bought by a car dealership. Demolition followed in 2008 but the location remained undeveloped due to legal battles, since Rand Steam Laundries was a heritage building that marked a site of black entrepreneurship dating to the late 19th century.³¹ That turn of events led Buthelezi to join August House as one of the first artistic tenants. Next move? Maboneng. “I think that’s my last stop,” he mused. That optimism proved premature as a few months on he had to relocate yet again – to nearby Selby – due to complications with renovations in the space above.

Buthelezi’s August House studio was an expansive former furniture factory, set on the first floor with some stairs leading to the basement parking. The space was punctuated by the distinctive necklaced columns of August House and half the floor covered with his multicoloured palette of plastic scraps. He collects these non-recyclable scraps from local supermarkets he has befriended. The immediate environment around August House was a source for Buthelezi in another way too. The street-level view from his studio window was a portal, or what he called ‘Live TV’. Its quotidian quality was reflected in his general subject matter of everyday scenes and interactions. “Standing from here looking outside, it’s interesting because whatever you see, it changes all the time.” Buthelezi described every canvas as telling a story and making its own way: “It keeps its own form; it doesn’t really go according to what I had in mind. I think that’s good. It evolves. I just want to allow it to take that direction and see where it ends. Otherwise it kills the interest and I want to be surprised as well.”

Large-scale canvases took up every wall surface, many of them complete and some of them in progress. The studio gave every sign of being a haven of activity. But on the day we first met for this research study, Buthelezi was mired in doubt about the pending relocation and not making any new work as a result. The news about the sale of the building was scuppering his artistic plans and he was in a kind of creative paralysis. He works largescale and needs space and security to keep going. And he was spending fruitless hours searching for a suitable new studio. His despondency was plain; more than that – it struck me as a form of Glissant’s refusal. “It kills me,” he said of his stuck canvases. “I am sitting in the studio and yet my mind is not in the

³¹ Pather, R. 2016. Battle to rebuild laundry won. *Mail & Guardian*, 27 May - 2 June: 16. In 2019, Rand Steam shopping centre, including an art gallery, opened on this location.

studio ... It pains me to come and sit here [August House]. It's not a creative space anymore."

At first, this artistic refusal suggested it might frustrate research intentions for tracking a new body of work. I counter-proposed to track the blockage instead of new work, by following already completed works and where they went as a form of the ghosting described earlier. Buthelezi agreed. Towards this end, I then visited a group exhibition in a Cape Town commercial gallery in April 2014, titled *What's Going On?*. I recognised Buthelezi's exhibited artwork from my first studio visit, where I had seen it leaning against a wall: a group of schoolboys in an arrested soccer match. It was marked for sale at R150,000 including gallery commission (usually 30% to 40%). Later, when describing his artistic motivations, he stressed that monetary valuation was not part of it. "I'm excited about visual impact and what difference it makes ... does it say something different?" (personal interview, 2014). Later, when Buthelezi held a solo exhibition in 2017 called *Sugar Tax*, he elaborated in his exhibition statement: "I find it interesting that something of no value, with the right care and attention can be used to create artworks of such beauty that they have considerable value to art collectors."

Over time, this ghosting approach of following already completed artworks instead of work in the making was in turn disrupted. On my third monthly visit to Buthelezi's August House studio, I found a radical change had occurred. A series of several new canvases were positioned along the wall and Buthelezi himself seemed a changed man. This series of portraits was a breakthrough; he had started to work again. The subject matter was inspired by his daughter and he named the series after her – *Nobuhle, Beauty Queen*. The theme of this new work, Buthelezi said, was transformation and linked to the disruptive situation he found himself in. "I cannot hide my disappointment [in the situation] but at the same time – let me look at myself and see what I am doing wrong." He compared the portraits to masks, as a commentary on the faces we need to wear in different contexts and imagined the final portrait in the series as a kind of palimpsest of faces that came before. "Every piece that I finalise, there is something that I carry with into the next piece." For my own part, I came to understand this breakthrough as a form of mobility, of moving forward, a kind of pivot with roots in a stubborn refusal. That pivot was evident in the work itself. *Nobuhle* became the new series this research project tracked. The series

developed over the research period through a metamorphosis of yellow, blue and orange – four canvases in each colour. Its apogee was a dense multi-coloured trio of canvases where the artist brought together all the colours from the rest of the series, along with silver and gold plastic rolls he ordered specially for the purpose. In October 2015, a colourful composite of his daughter's portrait was posted on Facebook along with 17 other works tagged 'SOLD!'. This tracking process, from blockage to breakthrough, thus comprised a series of paintings that were transfigured by heat from scraps and colour rolls into 13 completed canvases. The portraits were mostly sold to private collectors in the end.



Fig. 35: Mbongeni Buthelezi in his August House studio with the *Nobuhle* series just visible in the far left corner . Photo: Anthea Pokroy.

Formally, the *Nobuhle* canvases included a stylistic innovation – large swathes of negative space (white space) employed as elements in the composition. “The approach, technically and otherwise, it’s a completely different animal,” is how Buthelezi put it. I interpreted this innovation as emblematic. Buthelezi had turned an otherwise negative situation into a positive. By his own account, he channelled his frustrations into his work. Negative space became positive space. Further, the materiality underscored this potential. On a trip to the Edenvale factory, which every six months or so created bespoke plastic colour rolls for Buthelezi, it became clear how important the materiality was for the meaning of the work. For one thing,

Buthelezi was getting to know the manufacturing process for his colour rolls and this affected his own processes of making. He called this a journey on its own, which led to new ideas. In addition to bespoke colours, the factory often created colours for Buthelezi from a purging process when the machines were cleaned. He valued this mixed tonality which was otherwise a factory waste product. Further, the technical process of extrusion in the factory involved an intense heat, followed by an extended stretch and cooling process, resulting in an entirely new form (Fig. 36). This new form that draped from the ceilings in dramatic sheets began as a bag of plastic pebbles and after extrusion carried with it a different memory, according to the factory manager's explanation. Buthelezi's canvases, onto which he melted plastic scraps and plastic sheets as paint, underwent a similar process. Buthelezi had himself been through an intense stretch and cooling period after which a new set of possibilities emerged.



Fig. 36: General Distributors and Manufacturers in Edenvale, where Buthelezi orders bespoke coloured plastic rolls, creating new colours through extrusion.

These possibilities included self-built solutions for artistic resilience that Buthelezi came up with in his new studio space, a similarly expansive former factory in nearby Maboneng which he finally secured for relocation. First an industrial cage had to be removed, the space had to be painted and then a pulley system installed to get his oversized artworks up and down. Other artists were once more his neighbouring tenants, much to his delight. When we met there, his studio assistant Mike Tembe was busy for the duration sawing new lengths of wood for canvases. This initial move did

not work out, however, due to disruptive renovations above and he moved again to an industrial warehouse in Selby. This time, Buthelezi was the only artistic tenant in the complex.

Buthelezi's ultimate relocation solution extended to engaging the business world for further traction and sustainability. Following his relocation, Buthelezi decided to launch a new company called MB Studios. Part of this initiative involved forming an arts association to connect emerging artists and business entrepreneurs, which he founded with the curator Sarah McGee. It was borne of the idea that Buthelezi felt he should leverage his new space and his expertise to help other artists, "to create a platform for business people to come and exchange ideas and bring people under one roof" (personal interview, 2016). Later, Buthelezi also entered into agreement with a property management company, City Property, his new landlords in Selby. They primarily dealt with properties in the Pretoria central business district (CBD) with a stated portfolio comprising 433 buildings.³² Buthelezi worked with City Property to convene exhibitions of emergent artists at a Pretoria gallery, to help develop the inner city artistically. These new co-operative arrangements reflected the frustration Buthelezi felt about having to move studios every few years and his stated desire to own his own space in future.

As stated, the meaning of Buthelezi's creative turnaround on the one hand revealed the way artworks could convey artistic thinking, in this case an initial bout of artistic refusal which led to its own kind of creative breakthrough on different levels. His disrupted practice also made some latent linkages between space and imagination more explicit. Insecurity of tenure prohibited his creativity; a secure spatial footing helped inspire expansive initiatives to also benefit others. There was however a double-edged element to developing such co-operative solutions: it was advantageous for studio purposes but the quid pro quo was assisting to artistically enhance the urban fabric. This kind of engagement induces a series of externalities, positive and negative. Knock-on effects include buffering property values and hence relocation cycles, and artists and other more marginalised inhabitants are often at the receiving end of these dynamics, as Buthelezi's own relocation story attests. The significance of these new pursuits, and related observations, are reflected upon in Chapter 6.

³² Pretoria is about 60 kilometres from Johannesburg.

b) *Miles Rehearsal: Floor 2*

Daniel Stompie Selibe, better known as Stompie, had a studio on the second floor of August House. A multidisciplinary artist, Selibe creates across a spectrum of media and often combines them in a transdisciplinary way – such as fusing visual art with theatrical improvisation. His skills traverse painting, printmaking, music, art therapy, educational workshops, and performance. Painting, or mark-making in a broader sense, is perhaps his anchor. His practice is characterised by open-ended experiment; what could loosely be called a call and response. “This is the studio; the studio needs to be a messy place. It’s not an office” (personal interview, 2014). Selibe usually appeared for our monthly interviews at the studio door with paint-splattered apron and shoes, sometimes unlaced. His long hair was pulled back in braids, and occasionally he wore a cap. Softly spoken, with a musical lilt in his voice that suited his reflective musings, he described his subject matter in general as relating to Johannesburg. Selibe was born in Soweto, and was living in Kensington at the time.

At first, I contemplated tracking the journeys of multiple artworks as a form of collage to represent Selibe’s multifaceted oeuvre. In contrast to Buthelezi, with his temporary artistic refusal, Selibe was actively immersed during the research period in multiple endeavours from musical performances to visual exhibitions and workshops. Yet none obviously lent themselves to the tracking methodology of following one new series in the making. They were diffuse and impractical to follow. He also resisted putting his work into a fixed frame; his reflections were often detours in Glissant’s sense of opacity that revealed and concealed meaning at the same time. The net effect on the research of this ambiguity was getting enrolled in the slipstream of his creative process rather than the specificity of making particular works. It was the thinking behind the artworks that became more apparent to my inquiry instead, and that kind of insight proved generative for the project. This was very much in line with how Selibe himself created new works. He said: “I’m not trying to move with what people are wanting to see. I feel it’s a journey, it doesn’t have an end point. It offers an experience and people bring their own interpretation. It’s about *being moved* ... It’s a craft that grows with you; it has to speak for itself” (added emphasis). He drew a conceptual parallel with the Miles Davis album, *In a Silent Way*, which he often played while working in the studio. That album has no melodic frame but layering

instead. Selibe said of his own work: “It’s a continuous song but has so many elements and patterns that you could hear this song is moving to many journeys in life.” In this vein, his practice also offered another way for me to view mobility, a key concept in this thesis, as improvisation in the sense of a conceptual to and fro. It also underscored the artwork’s affective capacity - to move another human being.



Fig. 37: Selibe in his new Selby studio. Photo: Anthea Pokroy.

After surrendering myself to this ambiguity in the tracking process, with no specific artwork to track in mind but rather a process of making with multiple outcomes, it became apparent toward the close of the research period that I had in fact successfully followed a specific artwork after all – a new artistic collaboration in the making. That new collaboration most pointedly manifested in a musical performance of jazz improvisation at August House, titled *Miles Rehearsal*. The performance was conducted on 5 April 2014 as part of *At the End of August*, an event curated by August House artist Dorothee Kreutzfeldt and Bettina Malcomess (in a duo called deadheat), while the atelier was disbanding. The idea of *At the End of August* was to say goodbye to the building before it changed hands. The event was a kind of wake. Selibe’s collaborator was Joel Karabo Elliott, an American-Masotho poet and musician. They had been introduced to one another by a mutual friend, Phillippa Yaa de Villiers. Together, Selibe and Elliott performed at this goodbye event in his former August House studio for over an hour, with Selibe switching between a variety of

instruments. They were joined for an interlude by a third musician, Mpho Molikeng. The whole performance was documented on video by fellow August House artist Dineo Seshee Bopape. “The studio was empty, it was dirty, and then there was a performance. It gave people a different kind of loss; August House wasn’t ready to end like that. Because there is a beginning. A new generation is coming with this exciting way of working – performance, media of electronics, engagement. And ... that change brought a sadness especially for the people living there. The sound was depicting the sadness of loss and something that would emerge after that loss. I am not certain though about what will happen. It’s a journey of continuously working on your craft. Where is it taking me? You don’t know,” Selibe said.

In that improvisation, the studio could be conceived as a medium alongside the several musical instruments that Selibe and his collaborators switched between in *Miles Rehearsal*. The performance was an embodied demonstration of the relationship between space and imagination. The significance of *Miles Rehearsal* was its improvisational structure as a call and response. This communicated what Selibe described as a series of conversations that people would get engaged in when they came to visit the atelier. The performance reflected a process of to and fro, between space and imagination; and the atelier was also engaged in a kind of performance that did not have an ending – as Selibe himself described the August House transition while it was taking place. “I see this as a performance. The whole process. I feel like it’s a performance; people are still coming here and making a performance in the sense of [doing] their work” (personal interview, 2014). That observation was instrumental to understanding the atelier’s travails. It started a chain of thoughts that led me to consider the building itself as an artist, a performance artist, and the various dynamics around its sale as part of a durational performance piece (an artwork engaging space, time and the body, conducted over an extended period of time). The rest of the tenants were all collaborators in this performance that had no discernible end, ironically located on End Street.

The collaborative duo of Selibe and Elliott afterwards performed in other contexts – as *Roots Grown Deep* (Elliott’s initiative) and *Broken Chords Creative Studio* (Selibe’s initiative) – from Johannesburg to Cape Town and back. They also played gigs in people’s houses, and at venues like Afrikan Freedom Station in Westdene suburb. *Miles Rehearsal* travelled into new forms and contexts and continued

morphing beyond the research period. For instance, Selibe's collective performed at the Johannesburg launch of the book, *August House is Dead, Long Live August House!*, which cites their original performance, while the DVD recording of *Miles Rehearsal* played at the parallel Cape Town event to invoke this history.

At the End of August, the goodbye event which hosted *Miles Rehearsal*, also lived on, regenerated in a number of different ways that constituted second lives. Its leftover signage in the passages of August House – *At the End of August* (Fig. 38) – was adopted as collective identifier by the second floor's new artistic tenants after the building's sale, following the building's repopulation with a new cohort of artists. They appropriated this leftover vinyl tagline from the passage walls as their own collective signifier, without knowledge of the closing-down event that had created it. Sometime later, during 2017, a social media post of a dance performance at a reconstituted August House Open Studios day depicted this same leftover signage as backdrop (Fig. 39).



Fig. 38: Performance remnants from *At the End of August* goodbye event on the second floor (2015).



Fig. 39: Performance in front of *At the End of August* signage remnants (2017). Source: August House Studios.

Artistic elements and documentation from *At the End of August* also formed part of Kreutzfeldt's solo exhibition *Here We* at Ellis House in New Doornfontein, as mentioned, after she relocated there. This included a video installation that featured a soundtrack created from objects moving around August house in its closing-down phase, and visuals and reconfigured objects collated during this transition. In this sense the artwork of *Miles Rehearsal / At the End of August* also offered a different idea of mobility – as the variable interpretations and recontextualisations that followed in its wake. These new manifestations were in themselves a form of improvisation.

Selibe moved from August House to Selby, the industrial area adjacent to Doornfontein where Buthelezi also migrated. He found new studio space in another former factory and became part of a new studio collective that subsequently emerged in this Laub Street building. That new collective hosted an open studios night in February 2016 called *Diaspora in Ascension*. The event was described as an evening of music, visual art and dialogue. It was hosted by Selibe, Elliott and De Villiers. The evening included the open studios of other Laub Street artists Vusi Mfupi (also from August House), Ephra Maphoto and Zolile Phetshane. In addition to a studio that suited him better, Selibe better secured his professional footing after the August

House relocation by making different formal arrangements with the artworld. He entered into agreement with a commercial gallery to represent his work and help sustain his art production as a more viable prospect and later began putting together a solo show.

Selibe emphasised the importance of working collectively; this was something he himself had imbibed from an early age. “It’s a perseverance of sharing in some way. You make yourself vulnerable to the other – I am open to learning from you, there are things I don’t know and things I have to share ... I am open to learning *with* you.” He said the reason he liked working collaboratively was because of where he came from – he worked with a community centre in Soweto, the Progress Youth Club, during the late 1980s and 1990s, and the emphasis there was very much on working together to motivate young people in leadership positions and black culture. He said: “You need to learn to work as a team and not as an individual. I suppose that culture has changed over the years – people want to gain more wealth for themselves. I think it gives me a lot of pleasure and understanding, how to take things forward and create change and make a difference in society. Because change doesn’t happen as quickly as we hoped and you learn a lot working with other people.” He added: “The question is: how do you work around issues that we are faced with in our daily lives?”. Consequently, success in daily life was about having an impact, not necessarily acknowledged in accolades or so-called bling, nor “moving” in material terms of success, as he put it. Mobility to him was something quite different: navigating an open-ended situation. He knew of many ordinary artists who led very valuable lives, who were passionate about changing society to make communities stable. “Zim [Ngqawana] used to say I have so many awards but that means nothing – what has meaning is how do you craft your craft.”³³ Going to an artist’s studio, listening to him practice for hours, was fulfilling and motivating, Selibe said. “That would make so much impact. It tells me whatever I am doing, I am not doing enough. That’s how I was brought up: you must understand what you do. Society is changing, people have a different kind of mandate with their collaborations. They are looking to get something material out of it instead of staying focused upon building and exploring an open-ended situation.”

³³ Ngqawana, an accomplished jazz musician who also ran a music school in Gauteng, died in 2011.

Selibe thought that a problem with the atelier of August House was that it did not function sufficiently in a collective mode, that it was too self-referential. Outsiders interested in engaging artists also needed a way in, he said. “People could see the potential but they were not part of that. How could people invest in that, so that tomorrow they could be part of the outcomes of the next generation, you know?” Selibe suggested it was a dynamic that flowed both ways – artists also needed people with resources and interests. “Most organisations that have succeeded in the arts, they would honour people’s ideas and how they would help them to venture to the next level. And, you have to have connections.” He described this dynamic as a conversation that required a skeleton or structure to get somewhere. Without that, the building could not reach its full potential. That insight is taken further in Chapter 6, in particular how structural thinking could help make the world of artistic production more robust.



Fig. 40: Second-floor August House ‘ghostings’ after tenants relocated.

c) August House atelier: Floor 3

Bié Venter, who was a shareholder of August House Properties, runs her own company called Bié cc, which installs major exhibitions. She described herself as “Marmite spread thinly over the artworld” (personal interview, 2014). Through her work, she met the people deeply engaged in creating that artworld, and her August House loft told the story of these relationships through an impressive private art

collection she curated in its interior. Venter's space was formerly a perfume factory called African Sales, evoked by the porcelain tiles on sections of the walls. She pointed to a picture created from insulation tape directly onto those tiles, which a visiting artist drew and left behind. "I'll never be able to recreate this space ... for me it's one of my greatest achievements ever, the most beautiful thing I have ever made. I had this experience and it's been extraordinary." Her loft in this sense was an artwork – an installation of other artworks, within a building she had helped repurpose for artistic practice.

Venter was personally responsible for the transfiguration of August House into studios, buying into the management collective in 2006, and refurbishing the former factory into an atelier. The way she went about this had much to do with her own artistic sensibility and background; she desired an inner-city space for herself and also saw the broader need for artists to have affordable studios with lots of space and light, "the idea you have in your head, stories about New York, London, and other evolving cities, where artists live in fantastic spaces in industrial areas and pioneer new living arrangements ... I'd lived in a space like that and I wanted a space like that for myself." This sponsoring motivation, she said, was a key difference between August House and its neighbour, Maboneng, also built on an ethos of creative activity that plays with the idea of artistic value. August House was created by artists, for other artists. Property developers, on the other hand, can see the value of art, they can understand the investment value of art's worth, and they can understand that creating space to make work will benefit them but it's a different idea of value, Venter added. "I've been collaborating with artists, which fed the way my mind works [otherwise] I wouldn't have understood the need for this kind of thing. It's real artists needing real space to work, making gritty stuff." The volume of the spaces helped make August House distinctive but this quality also had to do with the tenants: "There is a certain kind of discussion that takes place between artists that is different from a discussion that takes place between stockbrokers or accountants. So there is an incredible energy, a creative energy, when you get a whole lot of artists together."

Venter was also the bridge, as one artist put it, to bring artists as tenants into the building, as well as the key liaison with other owners and management. This included taking risks on tenants who, for instance, did not come with references if they were young and emerging talents. "I had to convince the other shareholders that there is

value in art. They didn't understand what the value of art is." They subsequently came to love certain tenants but it also became difficult when people did not pay rent. Some had debt backlogs stretching back years. Although Venter said the building as an atelier never made any money, the owners felt it was better than having it stand empty as some inner-city buildings did. The city was in a downward spiral in the 1990s, Venter said; many tenants left and some of those that remained could not pay.



Fig. 41: Venter in her August House studio. Photo: Anthea Pokroy.

Venter first spotted August House when she lived in Louisar, another building across the road. At that time, she was working from a studio called Headspace. The latter included Kreutzfeldt and Selibe, among others, so it was really the precursor to August House atelier. Headspace was located in nearby Hoofd Mansions, which offered cheap rent – R1 a square metre. Its owners needed tenants for insurance purposes at a time when many inner-city buildings were standing empty following capital flight. From the 1980s onwards, many businesses vacated the Johannesburg city centre for securitised northern suburbs and decentralisation intensified. Venter saw August House from her kitchen window and approached Power Mazibuko, the caretaker, in order to identify its current owners and buy in. Together with a business partner, Maria Svane, Venter bought 50% of the shares in August House for R1 million. Two other shareholders owned the rest, 25% each. At that point (around

2006), the building was therefore valued at about R2 million.³⁴ Svane and Venter borrowed R600,000 to undertake renovations that turned this former textiles factory into a series of artists' lofts. When August House as an atelier turned one year old, Venter and early tenants threw a birthday party for the building complete with a cake that replicated the building's shape, and a solitary candle she saved as a memento that found an afterlife as one of many artefacts in her August House loft. It was a building with a personality. After nearly a decade as an atelier, August House finally sold onwards in April 2015. As Venter put it: "The only reason the building sold for R11 million is because of what it became – an artist's kind of building."

Venter's August House loft was really an art installation in itself, which told a visual story about the Johannesburg artworld, a story that spanned two decades. Linkages between space and imagination were materialised in this space in very concrete ways, through individual works and their juxtapositions, "like the biggest artwork I had ever made, every detail of the space". A curatorial loop through Venter's loft elucidated the personal relevance and deep connections of specific artworks in her collection and how they were acquired. In her telling of the stories behind them, and their careful placement in the studio itself, Venter revealed a web of interconnects. The artworks and artefacts, mostly gifted or exchanged, reflected meaningful relationships and events. They accrued deeper significance from a mesh of personal associations, relationships, experiences, events, conceptual understandings, insider knowledge, emotional attachments, and formal characteristics. Separately, each work offered its own particular provenance; assembled together, they qualified one another in an intriguing curatorial statement. This highlighted the possibility for collections to act as repositories of collective memory and tell a larger narrative, prefiguring the work that Chapter 5 takes forward.

By way of example: one of the first artworks Venter pointed out was *No Walls*, by Doung Anwar Jahangeer. She described it as a magnificent piece, exhibited at one of the first exhibitions in the nearby Parking Gallery, which was run by artist Simon Gush. The work was a sculptural installation that writes the word *No* on the wall and *Walls* on the floor. She described the artist as an architect who works with the spaces between walls, with the concepts of space rather than actual buildings, and conducts

³⁴ In June 2013, the resale value was R2.13 million, according to Adrian Myers who managed the building for August House Properties.

related walkabouts in city space. She wanted to buy the sculptural installation from him; he gifted it instead. Venter drilled holes in a template the artist marked out, and with the relocation from August House, it would need to be re-installed.

Venter had positioned the work within an indoor garden which comprised multiple plants and succulents, lined up inside the loft and visible through its front door. These plants used to live on the August House rooftop where they served as a kind of commons for all the tenants and signalled in this research the idea of an ecosystem, as described in Chapter 1. A barbecue spot was added. Parties and functions were held surrounded by this foliage: a wedding with a view, a formal dinner, a zombie re-enactment. But concerns about water leakage from building management meant the rooftop greenery eventually had to go and most ended up in her third-floor loft. Later, they migrated to her new Kensington home, bought once August House sold. This nomadic garden offered a personal narrative – Venter grew up with plants as a reference, her mother had an impressive garden. They also connected to the immediate environment: Venter had worked with plants in the nearby Joubert Park Greenhouse Project, where plants were part of a development initiative. And they carried resonance: one, she points out, was given to her by an artist, James Taylor, now deceased. For nine years, she had lived on his property as a tenant. Venter described it as a “Jesus plant” – red flowers that look like drops of blood.

Another example of how artworks in a collection could act as a repository of memory was a painting Venter owned, by Erika Hibbert, exhibited on her loft wall. The artwork told a story of a woman who became the patron saint of lightning. But its personal significance was far more emotional and harrowing. Hibbert is the widow of deceased musician, Gito Baloi. He was shot dead in April 2004 on the street corner clearly visible from Venter’s studio. She recounted hearing the gunshots that fateful night and the hair standing up on the back of her neck. “I sat upright ... and I thought – somebody has just been killed. But what can I do? I went back to sleep and the next day I got the phonecall and I just collapsed.” That murder of a famous and loved musician was reprised in an artistic intervention on that same street corner, co-ordinated by a collective that resided in August House, the Center for Historical Reenactments. They re-imagined the pink elephant icon that sat atop a corner store as a silent witness to Baloi’s murder and created a series of performative artworks around it (see 5.3.).

Venter was not sorry when she finally moved out of August House because she felt stressed from decades of working in the inner-city environment. “Artists make gritty artworks about it but the reality of living it and seeing it every day touches the soul of a person. I can’t understand that anyone can enjoy it for a long period of time ... You want to cry your eyes out. The reality of poverty is much much worse than what some artists think. And it’s not going to change people’s lives – really. It takes a lot out of you as a person.” I revisited her former space when all the other tenants were busy moving out. Where the garden used to be was a ghostly silhouette of an eagle on the wall. The bathtub still stood in the middle where it was positioned before, but otherwise the loft was empty. Later, after August House had changed hands and a new tenant moved in here, the porcelain tiles from its days as a perfume factory were chipped off the walls.

d) *Wife’s Lot: Floor 4*

Jacki McInnes, a sculptor, had a studio on the fourth floor of the building, on the far side from End Street. She shared space with Diane Victor, who had her drawing studio on the other side of a drywall partition.³⁵ Before that, McInnes shared an August House studio with Gordon Froud on the other side of the building. Her current loft was formerly an artists’ residency for Joubert Park Project (JPP). The JPP was a non-commercial collective, which operated from 2006-09, hosting numerous artistic projects and international artists creating work that engaged with the immediate inner-city precinct. Venter was part of its management collective for a time, along with Dorothee Kreutzfeldt and Joseph Gaylard.

My visits with McInnes were always in an organised space, deliberately kept that way, she said, as a bulwark against pending chaos. Her artworks were usually assembled in a conceptual patterning, a crossover between two- and three-dimensional creations. Her favoured materials of salt and lead were evident along with experiments in progress, found objects, and completed works. During the research period, McInnes was busy preparing for a solo exhibition at a commercial

³⁵ Acknowledgement: Before McInnes moved in, this studio was rented by the author who subsequently moved one floor down into a live-work studio. A relocation to Cape Town then transpired before the August House research period began.

gallery in Johannesburg. This helped her deal with the prevailing uncertainty about the relocation as she had to focus upon developing this new body of work by a given deadline. The new work dealt with issues of migrancy and displacement. After initial frustration about the building's impending sale, McInnes said she came to better understand the owners' motivations and the reasons the building struggled to sustain itself operating as an atelier.



Fig. 42: Jacki McInnes in her August House studio. Photo: Anthea Pokroy.

I initially considered following the journeys of a lifebuoy and other flotation devices that McInnes was creating in lead. But these artworks became earmarked for an academic project of the artist's own, so that idea was left behind. A double-headed eagle called *Janus: Gate-top Statuary for the Discerning Home Owner*, also created in lead, repeatedly caught my eye. That artwork was created for a 2012 solo exhibition at University of Johannesburg, *De Magnete*. It was modelled on the kind of decorative sculpture that commonly adorns entrances to large gated estates. During the research period, *Janus* travelled onto a group show of sculptures (*Rooftop Rooftop*) curated by Gordon Froud. Between these forays it occupied a range of humorous poses observed at different times – in repose on a trolley, suspended from the studio ceiling, prostrate in a garden with its feet in the air. But the artwork whose making and progression into the world I ultimately followed for the research was a sculpture called *Wife's Lot*.

That sculpture was created as a play on the biblical story of Lot's wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back at a city being destroyed. This life-sized sculpture of a woman, moulded from a volunteer's body and then cast in salt and resin, emulated in its pose the stricken position, as relayed by news media, of a Mozambican migrant to South Africa who was burnt to death in xenophobic violence in 2008. Jeppeshtown, the precinct immediately adjacent to August House, was a flashpoint during this same period of violence and hundreds of foreigners took refuge in the local police station. Migrancy was the key theme of this artwork and it offered in this thesis another way to apprehend mobility – not only as a choice, or open-ended navigation, or a means of getting ahead, but also as enforced displacement. The thematic paralleled a 'migration crisis' in Europe at the time and two key points of the artist's inspiration were news articles about tragedies where migrants lost their lives in desperate journeys at sea.

Once the artwork leaves the studio door, there is a rip of context as it gets differently framed and validated by the artworld, re-anchored and variously perceived in these elsewhere. Tracking *Wife's Lot* demonstrated how these contextual shifts make evident linkages between space and imagination by framing the reception of the artwork in a particular way. The sculpture was first exhibited at a group exhibition called *Deconstructing Dogma*, curated by Karen von Veh. Here, it was shown at University of Johannesburg (UJ) Art Gallery among other works about transgressive Christian iconography. Biblical references were foregrounded ahead of its sociopolitical resonance, in particular "the submissive ideal that has been promoted as acceptable female behaviour throughout both Old and New Testament scriptures"³⁶. It sat at UJ alongside the work of other August House artists including Victor, who contributed with a largescale altarpiece of smoke drawings on glass critiquing the priesthood, *No Country for Old Women*. Their two artworks were curated in deliberate conversation. The label for *Wife's Lot* detailed its medium of salt and M1 acrylic resin, its dimension and price of R90,000 including commission. Valuing artworks by price takes the charm out of them, McInnes holds; a practice that is depressingly more evident in graduate exhibitions, she adds, where students prematurely put an artworld value on their production and are too concerned with the

³⁶ 2014. *Deconstructing Dogma* [Catalogue]. University of Johannesburg, p. 42.

bottom dollar. Her own ideas around artistic value were best articulated when describing what qualities she looks out for when curating exhibitions, or acquiring works for her own private collection: “I recognised that he had a conceptual way of seeing things that blew my hat off,” she describes one artist’s practice that really appealed to her (personal interview, 2014).

In June 2014, after the UJ show, McInnes’s solo exhibition was held at Everard Read, a commercial gallery in Johannesburg, and it engaged migration of economic refugees. The exhibition title, *The Argonauts*, derived from Greek mythology, referring to a member of the band of men who sailed to Colchis with Jason in the ship Argo in search of the Golden Fleece. The word also denotes a paper nautilus sea creature, which corresponds to some of the more abstract works on show. Viewing this exhibition, after following the studio process behind its works, was deeply moving. *Wife’s Lot* was central and differently contextualised to its UJ appearance. Here, it spoke to thematics of forced flight, itinerancy and xenophobia that were dealt with in the larger body of work. McInnes said the sculpture’s meaning was open enough to be read to different ends.

The experience of tracking *Wife’s Lot* demonstrated how different artistic elements coalesced over time to create resolutions that could not be anticipated in advance. For instance, at different intervals during the research period, McInnes played with ideas relating to the sea that she had first conceived on an island artist’s residency in Sylt, Germany. At the time, it was not apparent where these references would go. They ended up manifesting in different ways in her solo. An intriguing and menacing installation of fish hooks in one of the exhibition rooms was one such resolution; previously she had called this work a problem child. It had to be resolved in the actual practice of the studio environment, a kind of learning by doing. This praxis engaged both theory and artistic action in a constant feedback loop, or what could be considered artistic thinking. McInnes’s process demonstrated what Kentridge was referring to earlier – that the artist’s studio offered a safe place for experimentation and letting the art-making lead. McInnes described this herself when she demonstrated work in progress in her studio, describing the table as pivotal to her practice in a rhizomatic way. “I prefer to move around when I’m making art and it’s the perfect height. [Making these drawings] is a horizontal activity by necessity because the ink is so fluid. So I have to apply it horizontally and then put it up. Then

it can be quite interesting because you make it horizontally and you think you know what you are doing and it's never the same.” Other examples of this deferred resolution were the various idioms relating to the sea that McInnes was considering during her Sylt residency, and which she wanted to pull into the solo exhibition somehow. At that point, in March 2014, it was not clear how this would resolve. In the end they morphed into artwork titles, from *A Drop in the Ocean* to *Wavelength IV*. The solo exhibition itself was also structured around a nautical idea of ripple effect, a principle that ran through her approach to production.



Fig. 43: McInnes's studio with the mould of *Wife's Lot* visible on the far table.

Wife's Lot was consciously threaded to the other exhibited solo works through drawings juxtapositioned on a wall. These included the depiction of a jackal walking into the distance, and various linking titles on other works including terms like “dog”, “kneeling woman” and “burning man”. Later, when I visited Venter in her new Kensington home, the artwork from the exhibition depicting the jackal sat above her dining-room fireplace. She has swapped it with McInnes for an artwork in her own collection and once more the web of interconnects became evident.

During the research period, I visited a foundry in the inner city to witness the casting process. The mould of *Wife's Lot* had just been released after the first casting had failed. The cast comprised an experimental mix of salt and resin so the required method was a case of trial and error. McInnes was doing the finishing work of the second successful cast, easing the seams and adjusting the lines. The first thing I took away with me was the readiness to experiment and try again; because when you are dealing with a new combination (salt and resin), you cannot anticipate the outcome and need to devise new methods to get there. These deviations could be considered a form of Glissant's detour, perhaps even his counterpoetics as the play with form was an effort to subvert its meaning. Secondly, I was struck by the structure of the foundry – each floor had its own dedicated function, from woodwork to casting. It reinforced my own thinking of August House in terms of its floors and as a potential narrative mechanism to link space and imagination.

Those kind of linkages between space and imagination were clearly evident in the artwork itself. *Wife's Lot* foregrounded sociopolitical concerns linked to issues of migration that were plain to see in the immediate inner-city precinct of the atelier. Doornfontein is a mixed-use area that, as indicated, includes a high proportion of migrants in its working-class population. The immediate realities, as strikingly evident from Badge Creations next door, were also pressing. Illegal electricity hookups, boards for windows and makeshift interiors had to co-exist with itinerant gangs. The city reports articulated below (4.4.) provide a contextual overview of these underlying realities. They were familiar territory for McInnes. She had previously engaged in her artwork with a nearby forced eviction witnessed during a collaborative project with photographer John Hodgkiss, *House 38*. Prior to working from August House, however, her artistic practice was more inwardly focused and related to personal identity. The atelier's specific urban environment inspired a more outward-looking approach, indicating once more the relationship between space and imagination. As with Venter, that context was also deeply troubling for McInnes. She felt she was not in a position to change its realities, and was thus conflicted about creating work around it.

During the research period, McInnes found new studio space at Nugget Square, in nearby City and Suburban, where Froud relocated. But the search was not easy.

“These places are like hen’s teeth,” she remarked about studios comparable to August House. She bought her new studio space this time around in preference to renting. It comprised a large warehouse that included a mezzanine level. Buying a studio space was not possible at August House owing to the ownership structure. The change at Nugget Square, from being a renter to a property owner, was a significant shift that secured a spatial footing. It also meant McInnes could reconfigure her new studio to bespoke requirements. After the research period ended, McInnes relocated to Cape Town and another artist took over her Nugget Square space. In March 2016, she held a goodbye party at the Johannesburg studio. *Wife’s Lot* was there, lying on her back wearing a floral dress. Outside the studio, a man sat on top of a boat, which included a life jacket. That selfsame boat was part of a performance piece, which McInnes had documented with a collaborator, photographer Leon Krige, just weeks before. Her idea had been gestating for some time, of an enactment of survivors making their way across a mine dump wearing life jackets, and the work had finally seen the light of day. In this work, she conceived of a Johannesburg mine dump as a desert or ocean the migrants need to traverse.

Not long after that goodbye party, the resolved artwork from the performance piece was exhibited on a gallery wall. A photographic image from this filmic installation was exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM), in a group exhibition McInnes co-curated, ‘When Tomorrow Comes’. It explored the idea of ‘end times’. Her own contribution, produced with Krige, titled *Sleeps with the Fishes*, dealt with a conflation of crisis, desperation, risk, shipwreck, rescue and hope. Her exhibition statement described the photograph, linking back to Gericault’s famous 19th century painting of a life raft, as a commentary on the elite’s treatment of people it considered disposable. Her philosophical engagement with the subject matter of ‘end time’ offered an insight about the research that chimed with Selibe’s view. McInnes said of this apocalyptic term: “My philosophy is no, it won’t just end. Certain things will end and new things will start and there won’t be a singular end point. There will be little areas where things will cease, and in those areas new things will regenerate and we will bumble forward in a way we don’t yet know”. Indeed, the transition of August House into another life seemed to manifest in just this way.

e) *Cone Virus*: Rooftop

Gordon Froud, an artist, curator and lecturer, had an incredible studio on the fourth floor of August House: every square inch of its large interior was occupied by art or work in progress. An irrepressible energy is evident in a prolific exhibition and curatorship record, and his studio reflected this relentless activity. Froud is also a collector so artworks hung in a salon-style exhibition around his loft. His entire private art collection at this time comprised about 3,000 works and his book collection numbered about 10,000. Froud bought his first artwork from a Hillbrow street artist, as a way of supporting their practice, and that inclination never really ended. His idea of value, like McInnes, was also evident from his own collection. The central artwork anchoring his studio was a triptych by his partner, Diane Victor, called *Trinity Fetish*. When he later moved studios, it again occupied central spot. He said: “I don’t have very many works in my collection that I ignore ... If I walk past [it], I still stop for half a second and look at it because it still intrigues me, comments to me and makes me feel uncomfortable. It reminds me that it’s there” (personal interview, 2014). Later, he described this quality in an artwork as something he would not have thought of doing. “It’s that surprise element, that’s what intrigues me. It’s a bit like being a bargain-hunter or collector. You are constantly on the lookout for something that catches your attention, that says ‘look at me, I’m a little bit different’. A bit of an edge to it.” Surprise was also what he sought to elicit in a viewer of his own artworks, who suddenly discovers that the object they are looking at is actually made of plastic coat hangers.

Buthelezi also emphasised the importance of surprise and it offered itself as another element of artistic thinking – to be comfortable with the unexpected. Indeed, I never knew what to expect when arriving for studio visits. Prepared questions were usually inadequate to address whatever became evident stepping through the threshold of the studio door. Life was always on the go and risk-taking was part of the territory, always with a lively sense of humour. There was no space for new work, as Froud readied himself to pack and move, yet he had just bought a print by Julia Davies, titled *How will you find a husband if you don’t eat your mushrooms?* in a witty conflation of Alice in Wonderland with Pink Floyd.



Fig. 44: Gordon Froud in his August House studio. Photo: Anthea Pokroy.

Despite having a studio on the fourth (top) floor, I have assigned Froud to the rooftop in this analysis for various reasons. For one thing, he hosted infamous parties that people in the Johannesburg artworld recalled and had never-ending stories about. He also made some of his artwork up there, including the *Cone Virus* series that I followed for this research – a series of sculptures assembled from oversized traffic cones into virus constellations. This series underwent a fascinating migration– from Johannesburg to Cape Town, and even to London. They travelled to a combination of private and public sites. These included exhibitions, private collections and auctions – one sold for R9,000 in a fundraiser for wetlands. But Froud himself thinks the value of artworks is beyond price: “Art objects are not just products, because they have human involvement invested in them. Because of human touch and consideration, [it] goes beyond mere design and manufacture. There is a kind of intrinsic hands-on value, or if not hands-on then brains-on. Within that, there is layering within the artworks that becomes intrinsically more valuable than just a product.”

The first public installation of *Cone Virus* was at Nirox Sculpture Park near Roodepoort, a bright orange star-like shape that was subsequently acquired by Spier, which has one of South Africa’s largest corporate collections. A replica of this sculpture was also the final tracked work in the series: commissioned by Propertuity for the rooftop of August House, as a highly visible landmark. A couple of the

sculptures in the series were stolen – one from a private collection, where it was exhibited in a garden; it was fortunately insured so a replacement could be made. Another *Cone Virus* on a public art exhibition in the Western Cape town of Hermanus got vandalised by celebrating school-leavers, and Froud donated it to the curator to repurpose. The curator had seen an earlier multicoloured version of the virus sculpture on exhibition at Clos Malverne wine estate in the Western Cape, which inspired him in the first place to include the work in the 2014 public art festival *FynArts* at Hermanus. One *Cone Virus* travelled all the way to AfrikaBurn in the middle of the Karoo – South Africa's version of the famous Burning Man festival in the United States. Another *Cone Virus* fell off a Pretoria gallery rooftop, before being tethered back on in time for the opening and was later acquired by the gallery as a permanent installation. A *Cone Virus* appeared on a rooftop exhibition in Pretoria and then Johannesburg, before migrating to Oudtshoorn as part of a solo exhibition at a major national arts festival. That same solo exhibition also included a segment of Froud's studio. Another long-term installation at Arts on Main in Maboneng got sunburnt; that orange sculpture was replaced with a sun-resilient silver version. A *Cone Virus* even appeared on the front cover of a glossy magazine, *House and Leisure*, which referenced it in an article about a private collection.

Cone Virus artworks travelled to a wide range of contexts, private and public. Their various deviations – theft, vandalism, sunburn – can all be considered as a form of Glissant's detour: the artwork ends up going somewhere it was never intended but the detour in turn can create unforeseen connections and new meanings. At their most compelling, the artworks were public installations that represented the power of the work to physically travel, to insert itself in various contexts, and accrue new meaning in the process. Moreover, this mobile artwork took the form of a fractal shape (Figs. 48 & 49, below), which can toggle between scales and denotes a correspondence between the whole and its parts. Fractal geometry is sometimes understood in opposition to Euclidean geometry with its European roots, from which deductive and logical systems derive. Froud's fractal cones thus offer a contextualised way of linking space and imagination, where the macro and micro correspond. This interscalar correspondence was also evident in the research at large, and is made explicit in *August House is Dead!*. In Chapter 5, another conception of the fractal in the ownership structure of the art collection will become evident. For now, the scalable fractal can be appreciated as a form of mobility, or movement, that collapses

Cartesian co-ordinates in favour of a new understanding of space-time as a viral patterning. In their series of adventures and misadventures, the *Cone Virus* artworks represented a self-replicating meme that offered up the idea of mobility as viral, replicating and morphing in ongoing cycles. They were playful forms but definitely not benign: in their wit, they managed to also insert critique into a range of environmental settings. The safety cones are warning symbols – specifically, Froud said the original oversized cones were often used on mines as a hazard symbol. A related association for any South African during the time of the making of the *Cone Virus* series was the Marikana tragedy near Rustenburg in 2012, when 34 protesting miners were shot dead by police.



Fig. 45: *Cone Virus* on the cover of *House and Leisure: the art issue*.

At the end of the research period, Froud was still thinking up new versions of the cone artworks in a series he called *Variations on a Virus*. Indeed, his prestigious solo exhibition at the Standard Bank gallery in 2018 featured a white *Cone Virus* as a central installation. For my own part, *Cone Virus* apparitions continued well after the research period concluded: giant blue cones marking out a parking bay in Sea Point; yellow cones perpendicular to a gallery wall in Cape Town; a series of cones stacked in the window of a junk store in Johannesburg; cones stacked outside Froud's new Nugget Square studio. I have represented this morphing trajectory of *Cone Virus* in a digital storymap, which can be accessed by scanning the QR code (Fig. 46) with a smartphone or following the online link³⁷. It offers a visual demonstration of the

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<https://s3.amazonaws.com/uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/1d24bf9fe3d6249bae13e8ac6ded956c/tes-t-run-ii/index.html>

capacity of the artwork to travel virally, telling the macro story of the atelier through the micro story of the travelling cones. Storymapping is a digital storytelling tool that blends text, visuals and geolocation and works particularly well for a storyline with a geographical element. The *Cone Virus* series, with its expansive trajectories, made ideal subject matter for this experimental narrative technique.



Fig. 46: QR code for a digital storymap detailing the journeys of Froud's *Cone Virus* artworks, which also offers a way to visualise the creative nonfiction book, *August House is Dead! Long Live August House!*

Froud eventually found a new studio at nearby Nugget Square in City and Suburban – it took a long search and involved a few dead ends. He also became a property owner there, along with McInnes. Moving from August House was a very difficult feat, however, considering his sheer volume of belongings. It took him six months to pack, three months to move, and three years to fully unpack. But soon enough, a new artistic hub developed around him. This was unsurprising given his role as a key connector in the Johannesburg artworld – he has given numerous artists their first solo exhibition at a now defunct gallery, Gordart, curated others onto multiple shows, and taught many more as students. The artists at Nugget Square in mid-2017 included Lazyhound Coka, Nhlanhla Nhlapo, Nelson Macuba, Bamboo Sibiya and Sam Nhlengethwa (who also moved from August House, where he had taken over Froud's former studio). Also present was the successor space to Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR). Gabi Ngcobo launched with former August House tenant Dineo Bopape a new institute at Nugget Square, called Nothing Gets Organised (NGO). NGO said it was interested in self-organising processes that do not imply

structure, tangibility, context or form, “a space to reflect upon shifting and uneasy entanglements”, according to its online descriptor.³⁸

Over time, Froud’s studio space expanded into the warehouse unit next door, using recycled materials and employing other artists where possible in the build. Froud converted this expanded space to collective ends. He launched a collaborative gallery space called *Stokvel*, a drawing and printmaking space, as well as a small residency room for visiting artists. The significance of these moves is elaborated upon in Chapter 6 as an emblematic example of artistic thinking, turning uncertainty into nested capacity through collectivity.



Fig. 47: Gordon Froud’s raw material in the basement.



Fig. 48: *Cone Virus* installation at Arts on Main, Maboneng.



Fig. 49: *Cone Virus* at Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK). Image: Gordon Froud.

4.4. Context: the city of Johannesburg

Doornfontein was the historical root of contemporary Johannesburg. End Street, where August House is located, formed the far corner of a triangle of unclaimed ground or *uitvalgrond* that became modern-day Johannesburg on the back of a gold mining camp (Beavon, 2004: 52). That triangle of land was wedged between three farms – Doornfontein, Braamfontein and Turffontein. Doornfontein, proclaimed in 1887, was initially home to high society when wealthy Randlords like Barney Barnato lived there before moving to Parktown Ridge. This triangle over time became the

³⁸ https://www.facebook.com/pg/Nothing-Gets-Organised-NGO-1693239974254541/about/?ref=page_internal

central business district, Beavon wrote, serving as frame for the city's expansion until decentralisation from the 1960s. Consequently, the seeds for transfiguration are in its very soil.

The summary of reports, below, offers a spatial grounding for the urban materialities of everyday life in this precinct and hence a better understanding of August House as the quotidian micro tier of Coole's expanded new materialism, described earlier.

These reports, dealing with the condition of South African cities, help to appreciate why Johannesburg is such an emblematic place of change. The broader context is that 60% of the South African population is now urbanised and by 2030, that figure is expected to increase quickly as part of a continental dynamic. According to the Brenthurst Foundation, by 2050 the majority of Africans and 66% of the world's population will live in urban agglomerations. Sub-Saharan Africa specifically is expected to more than double its population by then and its urban areas are expected to grow by 800 million (Kilcullen, Mills & Trott, 2015: 3). Johannesburg is at the epicentre of this dynamic, with the highest growth in South African population and migration in its province of Gauteng. This brief review of the state of South African cities will help in turn to understand the territory of August House and broader socio-economic realities. Dynamics within the immediate neighbourhood, the lives of its protagonists, the interiority of the building, and the meaning of the artwork created from its midst correspond to this context. Shifting global geopolitics are also relevant. The overview thus begins with a recent report by the United Nations (UN), before localising. The broader point is that Doornfontein shares a condition of flux with other transitioning spaces in cities around the world; it is a condition both singular and common.

a) Three quarters of the world's cities have higher income inequalities than two decades ago, according to UN Habitat's *World Cities Report 2016*, which described this phenomenon in succinct terms. A chapter on the widening urban divide shows the spatial concentration of low-income unskilled workers in segregated residential quarters as a poverty trap. These neighbourhoods have severe job restrictions, high rates of gender disparities, deteriorated living conditions, social exclusion and marginalisation, and high incidence of crime (Moreno et al., 2016: 83). The report further advocated 'the right to the city' approach in response to such exclusions, to

encourage heterogenous, dense and diverse places of innovation. This thread is developed in the other examples, below.

b) The South African government policy framework for urbanisation, the *Integrated Urban Development Framework* (IUDF), was formally adopted in 2016 for cities and towns with the intended key outcome of spatial transformation. The reason this was key, as the IUDF preface sets out, is because of South Africa's history of racial segregation and separate development that created an inefficient structure of urban and metropolitan areas, fragmented residential settlement patterns, underdeveloped business areas in townships and long travel times between home and work. Its policy levers included integrated planning, transport/ mobility, settlements and infrastructure, efficient land governance, inclusive economic development, empowered active communities, effective urban government, and sustainable finances ("Integrated Urban Development ...", 2016).

Most pertinent to understanding the August House context is the framework report that describes South Africa's urban reality. It highlights how cities were shaped by the legacy of apartheid, giving information on demographic, migration and settlement patterns, and explains how the rural and urban are interconnected and interdependent. It also describes why urban areas are important – a benefit called the urban dividend. This amounts to an optimal conflation of people, economy and place, a situation where the increasing concentration of an economically active population translates into higher levels of economic activity, greater productivity and higher levels of growth ("Integrated Urban Development ...", 2016: 20). Indeed, Johannesburg is attempting to build a polycentric city, linking more people, jobs and spaces. This is epitomised in its Corridors of Freedom project, a spatial development to link key economic nodes with public transport and with dispersed residential areas.

c) *The Cities Report* published by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) proposes that South African cities are an undervalued asset and makes a case for harnessing productivity gains from better-run cities to escape the trap of low growth and high unemployment. Because cities bring people together, they foster development: "Cities make it easier to collaborate, to share ideas and generate new ones. The scale of urban economies allows firms and people to specialise, so that large, complex tasks can be divided into smaller ones performed by people with

different talents and interests, creating higher levels of excellence and various economies of scale” (Bernstein, Altbeker & Johnston, 2016: 2). The report added that cities have bigger markets to cover more easily the fixed costs of activities – such as all-night pharmacies, universities, museums, airports and scientific laboratories. “The result is a massive increase in output per person per hour’s work, which unlocks far more value. Cities are places where people are able to combine their skills and energies more productively than anywhere else” (Bernstein, Altbeker & Johnston, 2016: 3).

The report deals with South Africa’s problematic urban spatial legacy, highlighting how low population density is a legacy of apartheid. In South Africa, population densities range from 2,500 to 4,000 per square kilometre versus comparable cities like São Paulo of 7,000, or some Indian cities ranging to 30,000, the report said. Moreover, low density reduces the benefits of proximity, sharing ideas and collaborations while transport costs are raised: “Despite paying lip-service to the need to densify the cities, many post-apartheid policies have unintentionally reinforced and reproduced apartheid spatial patterns through badly-designed patterns of investment in housing, transport and other infrastructure” (Bernstein et al., 2016: 4). This includes low-cost housing on land that is often on the outskirts of cities.

d) Spatial transformation was also a preoccupation in the *State of South African Cities Report 2016*, published by South African Cities Network (Karuri-Sebina, 2016). The report leads with a special chapter on this topic. Spatial transformation is described as a fundamental imperative for South African cities – inefficiencies are due to the combined effects of an apartheid legacy of displacement for the black population and public transport neglect, together with post-apartheid developments that continue to locate subsidised housing and poorer populations in peripheral areas (Karuri-Sebina, 2016: 48-49). “This affects productivity, results in long and expensive commutes for poor urban residents, and perpetuates neighbourhoods that are separated by race and class. Issues of settlement (land access and housing) and mobility (transport) require short and long-term strategies to address spatial inefficiency and exclusion” (Karuri-Sebina, 2016: 10-11). In order to transform space, the report said power relations, institutions, and capabilities in the system also need to be transformed. Regulations and public instruments could be used but deliberate market interventions were also required, as well as transit-oriented developments.

In a chapter on inclusive cities, the *State of South African Cities Report 2016* held that cities still largely benefited those who could buy their rights and freedom to the city while the majority was socially, spatially, culturally and economically excluded.

“They cannot live the lives that they value and have reason to value – they remain unfree,” (Karuri-Sebina, 2016: 158). It called for urban spatial frameworks that better accommodated a growing population, and for reserving land inside the urban edge for high-density, mixed-use and integrated developments for those currently excluded. Private sector actors should also consider the social good, it added. In a section on gentrification, the same report said urban land was at the heart of the spatial transformation agenda (Karuri-Sebina, 2016: 147). This raised issues of land ownership, access and land management problems inherent in the country. The report also contextualised the rise of cities globally, positioning Johannesburg city-region as the 40th largest urban area in the world (population over 8.5 million and density of 3,300 people per square kilometre).

e) *The Gauteng Quality of Life (QOL) Survey 2015* by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) is the fourth survey in a series conducted every two years, of the province hosting Johannesburg. It found high levels of satisfaction with basic services, health and education but lower levels of satisfaction with government initiatives to grow the economy. Notably, there were growing levels of uncertainty with regards to government generally and a concomitant middle ground of potentially ‘undecided’ voters. While the social fabric remained frayed, the report found there was some softening of attitudes. The survey was conducted among 30,000 respondents across Gauteng, asking questions on a range of issues that shaped the quality of daily life in the city-region. It also included a marginalisation index, which measured the psychosocial status of respondents. This measure worsened for 2015, on the back of deteriorating levels of participation in clubs, societies and other community organisations and a worsening health dimension but all other categories improved.

The QOL survey included a dedicated chapter on inequality, which found that income inequality in Gauteng had fallen slightly from 0.75 in 2013 to 0.7 in 2015 (where 0 reflects perfect equality and 1 perfect inequality). Despite the decrease, the summary report compiled by GCRO pointed out this level was extremely high relative to global standards: “UN-Habitat reports that the most unequal cities in the world are in South

Africa: in Buffalo City, Ekurhuleni, eThekweni, Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Bay and Tshwane” (Götz & Mushongera, 2016: 48). It said wide income disparities in Johannesburg were slightly leavened by rising incomes in lower and middle income households with a significant reduction in households receiving no income at all. But there was also a decline of households earning in the top two deciles over the past two years.

These five reports all suggested transformation of inequality, including spatial manifestations, was a key prerogative. The economist Thomas Piketty visited South Africa in 2015, shortly after coming to prominence with a book that made an important point about the inherited nature of wealth and inequality, or how the past exceeds the present. He said in a public lecture that there was very little data on wealth in South Africa, despite topping the comparative tables, and more transparency was needed about income and wealth dynamics, which the second case study will engage. “It is very important for a country to look at year after year how different social groups and the different wealth groups are doing; and how they are benefiting or not benefiting from growth and development” (Piketty, 2015). Piketty used income tax data together with a national accounts survey to show the share of total income going to the top 10% of income earners in post-apartheid South Africa was 60-65%, in 2015. By comparison, using similar data for Brazil, this number was 50-55%; in the United States, 45-50%; and most European countries, 30-35%. Piketty also encouraged financial transparency because it had a particularly African dimension; he said 30% to 50% of the continent’s financial wealth was held offshore (Piketty, 2015).

In summary, it is evident from this grey literature that Johannesburg inner city has a very particular urban context. The city fabric is fractured spatially, still trying to transform the political miracle that ended apartheid in 1994 into an economic one, and battling stark inequalities of different kinds. Johannesburg inner city was formerly the business heart of the country but in the 1980s there was major capital flight, to northern and securitised suburbs. Although this meant the more affluent and mobile moved out, it also made room for others to move in. The area of Doornfontein specifically is working-class and diverse. It bustles with formal and so-called informal enterprise, troubled too with physical and infrastructural violence but exhibiting a transforming pulse of the city. This context helps to grasp other kinds of

transfigurations in the research that are tracked through the trajectories of artworks conceived in this very precinct.

4.5. Conclusion: artistic thinking

How can knowledge be embodied or represented by a work of art? James Elkins, in a published interview, thought this was one of the largest unsolved issues of 20th and 21st century art theory (Anon, 2011). Elkins suggested, among the many possibilities, that either art embodied knowledge but it was necessary to produce accompanying texts in order for that knowledge to be articulated; or art embodied knowledge that cannot be translated into words, and must be considered alongside linguistic, propositional, logical knowledge (Anon, 2011: 88). In a public presentation, Elkins (2017) elaborated on this dilemma: few researchers say whether art *is* knowledge or art *embodies* it, he said. My own research into August House atelier suggested neither of these binaries. Instead, contemporary art was itself a vector of value. Its meaning was performative, which will be expanded upon in chapters to follow. The respective journeys of the tracked artworks highlighted different mobilities as examples of detour: transformation (Buthelezi), improvisation (Selibe), migrancy (McInnes), and the viral fractal (Froud).

The physical space in which the artworks were made became part of the work's genome, making linkages between space and imagination evident. Buthelezi created everyday scenes partly inspired by the 'Live TV' outside his window and quite literally created paintings from scrap material collected from local supermarkets. Selibe created a situated call and response that took the material realities around him into account. McInnes created artworks that dealt with the socio-economic realities plainly evident in neighbouring surrounds. And Froud brought along subversive wit into his re-combination of everyday objects that travelled virally from place to place. What truly surfaced linkages between space and imagination was the disruption to artistic practice caused by the sale of August House – the key catalytic event. This revaluation had multiple roots: the immediate precinct itself was changing and sending property values higher; more people were looking for homes; manufacturing was being increasingly sidelined; and disinvestment through decentralisation was still evident. The building was also revalued because of its artistic character but as Chapter 1 has already pointed out, it is very difficult to discuss the politics of imagination and

production of space without first grasping what it is that artists do and how they do it, and then considering the circuits of capital and infrastructures of the artworld. It is also important to begin such an investigation in the studio because productive labour is sometimes forgotten altogether, following Henri Lefebvre, and this ‘forgetfulness’ makes possible the fetishism of commodities; it was never easy to get back from the object (work) to the activity that produced or created it but doing so was the only way to illuminate its nature and reconstitute the process of genesis and development of its meaning (Lefebvre, 2012: 151). All other ways, he said, just generated an abstract model instead of an object in its entirety of forms, structures and functions. This research study thus deliberately starts with the making of the work, and privileging this starting point has implications for the observations and findings.

Most strikingly, it was the artists’ responses to the prevailing condition of uncertainty that characterised this case study, as evident in their strategies of resistance, that were key to research findings. Buthelezi was at first in a state of artistic refusal but ended up leveraging the situation into a technical and creative breakthrough, evidenced by the new use of negative space. This manifested visually in the final portrait series that he produced during this time of precarity; the series carried this revelation in its formal composition. Further, his very medium of melted plastic mimicked his strategy of transformation – extreme heat converting plastic into a new form with a new ‘memory’ as the plastic reshaped. And, when he relocated, Buthelezi turned his new space to collective ends. Selibe performed the uncertainty out in a new collaborative work that used improvisation as a way of moving forward, to fashion a creative response of conceptual to and fro. The ephemeral nature of the work posed a provocation in its lack of physical form to consider other kinds of value beyond a saleable artefact, and towards collectivist responses that were resilient yet immaterial in nature. McInnes responded by focusing upon a productive output, a solo exhibition, to hedge against the continual flux. Her subject matter of migration or displacement was also a form of detour, or response to a disguised situation of oppression. Her studio demonstrated a place of working things out, with trial and error, until a new resolution gained traction. Froud took the opportunity to re-organise his practice and leverage his new studio space towards collective ends on the principle of a collaborative social economy. His viral artwork represented in materiality and form the principle of never-ending transfigurations and innovations that were also scalable. What these strategies amounted to was collectivity in self-organised solutions (see

Chapter 6). Artistic thinking is evident in the multifarious ways the artists coped with the hiatus they found themselves in as uncertainty around the atelier's sale permeated their working conditions. The self-inventive strategies they ultimately devised simultaneously pointed towards larger systemic failures that the next case study is designed to address.

Artistic thinking was also an approach, a way of seeing the world or a visual knowledge that the artworks made evident. And the key participants at August House all had different ways of thinking about what mattered (value). For Mazibuko, it was all about family and living a godly life ("Only God knows"). For Khumalo, what mattered most was the work you were doing. Venter spoke about value in terms of space and creative thinking. Buthelezi thought it was about creating an artwork that said something new. Selibe demonstrated that value came through a collective identity. For McInnes, it was about inhabiting ambivalence. Froud sought a surprise moment to help shift perspective. These ways of thinking were also ways of doing that were embodied in their work – whether ritualistically sweeping the basement with an industrial broom every morning, playing the bamboo flute in an improvised composition, or sending viral-shaped cone sculptures into the world. Observing this artistic thinking was part of the delight in the research study. As Mariapaola McGurk, the director of a consultancy called Coloured Cube, told delegates at a public space seminar, artists added value to society and that needed to be acknowledged and used to a larger extent. "What artists do in their process is sorely lacking in other institutions – this is the key value they bring ... Artists must realise how valuable we are in how we do things and how we think" (McGurk, 2017).

Eve Chiapello (2004: 585) uses a term akin to artistic thinking, 'artist critique', to synthesise "the many forms of critique first levelled against the new industrial, capitalist, and bourgeois society of the nineteenth century, largely by artists in the name of freedom and individual fulfilment". She goes on to identify this critique as being in crisis, co-opted by the business world of neo-management, driven by increased influence of service activities, and thus losing poignancy: "This convergence dramatically decreases the possibility of declaiming an artist type of critique" (2004: 592). Chiapello adds that "the development of flexible neo-capitalism can be seen as the result of the co-optation of proposals of artistic critique by business interests, such as the individualization of performance evaluation and carriers,

reduction of direct hierarchical control, and so on” (2004: 593). She concludes despite this crisis that ‘artist critique’ continues to call attention to unresolved problems. “It embodies a discussion as to the value of things and stands opposed to the commodification of other forms of values which money will never be able to take into account: artistic value, aesthetic value, intellectual value, and what Benjamin called ‘cultural value’. It draws attentions [sic] to the existence of unprofitable activities that cannot be sustained by market forces alone, but whose value must nonetheless be acknowledged” (Chiapello, 2004: 593). Each artwork constructs an inexhaustible world that it is, however, able to question – an act of resistance, “vested with the mission to manifest the desire for an enchanted and enchanting world, ultimately defying all analysis” (Chiapello, 2004: 594).

Such a vision of contemporary art as a site of resistance as well as re-enchantment is increasingly evident in South Africa, in particular in public art contestations. One of the latest examples of this capacity was the public sculpture of Cecil Rhodes, a colonialist, which was removed in April 2015 from the University of Cape Town’s upper campus (a public heritage site) to interim storage. This disappearing act helped trigger a new sociopolitical movement protesting structural inequities from the past that continue to inflect the present. Its empty plinth remains at time of writing an ongoing site of re-imagination, from graffiti to performance to installation. Without going into further contested details here, the protest ignited by the statue arguably helped recalibrate the public sphere and make a discussion about decolonisation concrete. In doing so, it demonstrated how art has the capacity to enact shifts in the public realm. This lays more emphasis upon understanding how art could act as such a vector in the first place. The mobile meaning of the artwork begins in the studio; this case study set out to discover how artworks became matter by following their genesis as a way to understanding artistic practice and process – or artistic thinking. It also took note of where the artworks travelled, to see how their embodied meanings transfigured across the threshold of the studio door. In so doing, the case study also explored what was august about August House.

August House was ahead of its time in 2006 when artists first moved in to a repurposed factory, before inner-city rejuvenation set in. Almost 10 years later, the building started another life under new ownership – in surprising return to artistic form rather than residential conversion. The fate of August House and its diaspora

may speak to the metropolis of the future and new cultural forms. Interestingly enough, a factory has always been present at August House. Previously, a cut-and-trim company was an anchor tenant while under new management an embroidery firm moved in. What comes after the reconfigured factory? Manufacturing itself has entered a new age of production, according to Arup's report *Rethinking the Factory* (Hargrave & Goulding, 2015); it finds a collective consequence of a range of advances is a shift towards fast, open, collaborative and responsive design and innovation processes. Post-industrial cities like Detroit have been compared to Johannesburg, recently in the fictive writing of Lauren Beukes. In *Broken Monsters*, Beukes partly drew upon the inner-city borough of Hillbrow in her evocation of a failed artist and broken man. A post-factory future is differently evoked in *Commonwealth*, where Hardt & Negri suggest "*the metropolis is to the multitude what the factory was to the industrial working class*" (2009: 250, original emphasis). Moreover, Hardt & Negri (2009: 250-1) saw the metropolis as a factory for the production of the common – beyond a natural common to include an 'artificial' common of languages, images, knowledges, affects, codes, habits and practices. They held that production of the common was nothing but the life of the city itself. If the post-factory world is indeed the metropolis, then the reconfigured fate of August House from factory into atelier could indicate something about urban forms to come.

In closing, Koyo Kouoh runs an independent platform in Senegal called Raw Material Company that she described as operating on principles of subversion, experiment, horizontality, vulnerability and interdependence.³⁹ In a public lecture, Kouoh advocated for alternative art spaces and models where theoretical, practical and local knowledges could meet an international outlook. "Through the practices of these spaces, it provides pathways to understand the particular reality and forms we should embrace again somehow" (Kouoh, 2015). Chapter 6 and the Conclusion make some propositions along these lines. But first, the thesis turns to the second case study to address more systemic issues that affect the trajectories of artworks beyond the studio door.

³⁹ In 2019, Kouoh was appointed as Director of Zeitz MOCAA.

Chapter 5: The collection

Part I

“The more and more I get into art, the more I realise what I don’t know.” – Herman Steyn (personal interview, 2015).

5.1. Prelude

The artistic model of being in the world is as much about what you don’t know, according to Penny Siopis (2017), an artist, speaking at a public talk about her work in progress. “It’s about alterity,” she said. “You don’t know what it is ... [and] that becomes a kind of model for thinking about the uncertainties in the larger world we engage, and power.” The previous chapter on the August House case study demonstrated among other things how artists dealt with a prevailing condition of uncertainty triggered by the atelier’s sale, the artistic thinking involved in their coping strategies, and how their artworks reflected the same. But investors hate uncertainty. So much so, there is even a way to invest against it.⁴⁰ How then does a group of private art collectors, assembling works of African contemporary art, for both aesthetic pleasure and profit (capital appreciation), approach the condition of uncertainty? The Scheryn Art Collection, a new initiative based in Cape Town, collects works of contemporary art from the African continent and diaspora. The research results for this second case study, which closely tracked the set-up of Scheryn and its valuation processes, are somewhat surprising. Its artworks were mostly acquired for their global relevance as windows on the world, and uncertainty regarded as part of the territory. As with the studio case study, collectivity was the answer to navigation of the latter, but differently pursued through formal strategies (‘structural thinking’) rather than more informal self-organised solutions (see 5.8.).

In addition to engaging with the first key concept of uncertainty in a different way, the Scheryn case study detailed in this chapter also extended understanding of the second key concept of mobility. In its tracking of artwork trajectories, the August House case study made linkages between space and imagination explicit that, in

⁴⁰ The Vix, colloquially referred to as the uncertainty index or the fear index, is a popular measure of implied volatility of the S&P 500, the major American stock market index. Despite mixed fortunes, aggregate assets under management of almost \$4 billion relate to the Vix Index, according to *Financial Times Weekend* (Wigglesworth, 6/7 May 2017).

addition to physical trajectories, demonstrated other kinds of mobility (transformation, improvisation, migration/ displacement and viral fractals, respectively) and ideas transference. The tracking of the Scheryn artworks ushered in the idea of artwork trajectories as travelling to implied spaces, which this chapter will expand upon. Six artworks in the collection were closely followed, in a similar methodological approach to August House. But owing to the early stage of the collection's life, they were recalcitrant to play along with any idea of a linear journey from place to place. This form of artistic refusal was fortuitous because deeper processes and interconnections became evident instead. The 'thing' the research followed was in fact the assemblage process of the collection, or how and why artworks might get formally accessioned into the artworld, and hence a way of doing – what I have termed structural thinking.

Indeed: thinking and thingness are interrelated but we only really begin to confront the 'thingness' of objects when they stop working for us, as Bill Brown points out – the drill breaks, the car stalls, the window gets dirty, and their flow in circuits of production, distribution, consumption and exhibition is momentarily arrested (2001: 4). This is when an object asserts itself as a 'thing', and this thing is less an object than a particular subject-object *relation* (Brown, 2001: 4, added emphasis). 'Thing' indexes a liminality, "to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable: Dr Seuss's Thing One and Thing Two" (Brown, 2001: 5). Similarly, Ian Cook and Michelle Harrison (2007) found the bottle of hot pepper sauce they were following could not in fact be followed with direct connections; yet buying and using this sauce did connect them through entanglements: "In, and through, that bottle of sauce, an amazing array of complex connectivities and mobilities, at work at starkly different scales, seemed to be being mobilized" (Cook & Harrison, 2007: 58). Their detailed case studies offer an apt illustration of how capitalist relations not only could be, but are, diverse, different and surprising (Cook & Harrison, 2007: 40). This case study shares that spirit, as the collection's co-founder portrays in the chapter's opening quotation, indicating some common conceptual ground with its partner case study. Scheryn also shares the notion of entanglement by focusing upon the switching points of intermediaries, described earlier by Callon as professionals of entangling.

To recap: the *raison d'être* for the Scheryn Art Collection case study was triggered by the sale of August House. That disruption made it necessary to look beyond the studio door in order to address the structural realities that impacted upon artistic production and *how artworks come to matter* in the broader world. In similar fashion to August House, a disruptive revaluation also impacted upon this case study and proved to be a key catalytic event – but this time through a buy-in rather than a buy-out when a new collector joined the Scheryn initiative. Likewise, that eventful catalytic news drew the research period to a formal close. This case study essentially covered the teething stage of Scheryn and learnt its valuation criteria for accessioning artworks into the collection. This is of interest in itself, given such validation processes for artworks are often opaque. To cite Siopis (2017) once more, a certain kind of thinking needs the practice to be visible. Both case studies in fact made process legible – creating artworks on the one hand and assembling a collection on the other.

In short, the Scheryn case study detailed in this chapter explores the research problem from a systemic point of view, engaging in the process Coole's macro tier of an expanded new materialism: the intermediaries that form the switching points for matter. Part I is focused upon the Scheryn Art Collection and its curation. Part II is focused upon the collection's underlying technical mechanism, the Scheryn Art Collection Trust, in the broader context of the art market. Whereas Chapter 4 focused upon intrinsic value and the mattering of artworks, Chapter 5 is focused upon extrinsic valuation and how artworks come to matter. It does so at a time of increased interest in contemporary art from the continent. Just prior to the research period, the Angolan pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale was the first African winner of the prestigious national pavilion award; London's Tate Modern held the first major retrospective of Sudanese painter Ibrahim El-Salahi and an installation of Meschac Gaba the same year, while El Anatsui exhibited at New York's Brooklyn Museum of Art. International auction results also portrayed heightened financialisation, as the research will show. Chapter 6 will bring the two case studies together in a synthesis of the artworld ecosystem – the nest of the studio and the tree of the collection – to make propositions about its sustainability that further engage the third key concept of the web.

5.2. Case: Scheryn Art Collection

This case study engaged how fine art moved into the artworld and related ideas of valuation. My research began a few months after the formal establishment of Scheryn in February 2015, and ended about 18 months later when a new collector entered the fray. The launch of the collection followed a lengthy setup process by Scheryn's founders to resolve the technical structure.⁴¹ It then became operational and its management team started building up a collection of African contemporary art. The formal research began in September 2015, following preliminary discussions.

The Scheryn co-founders are Herman Steyn, who separately runs an investment management business, and Dabing Chen, an entrepreneur and philanthropist. They are both art collectors in their own right and this shared interest led to the original idea, which was to set up Scheryn as an independent art fund since no equivalent reportedly existed on the continent at the time.⁴² The case study thus broke new research ground. Steyn and Chen invested seed capital for the fund in a 50/50 split, once the technical structure to operate as a private trust had been resolved. Soon thereafter, a collection of contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora began to be assembled in earnest and this setup process was documented by the research study.

Scheryn's stated aim from the outset was to collect African contemporary artwork with global appeal. By way of example, Steyn pointed in one interview to a photographic print by Nandi Mntambo, profiled later in this chapter. "I mean *this*, it could be anywhere for someone who doesn't know who she is." He flipped through more artwork reproductions in the collection's portfolio, punctuating them – "That could go anywhere, this could go anywhere" (personal interview, 2015). Scheryn, managed from Cape Town, also made its acquisitions from different localities – local and international. For instance: during the research period, the work of an artist from Ghana was viewed in Italy and acquired in Cape Town. This reality reflects an idea of global flows, or "cross-border geographies" comprising multiple specialised global economic circuits that connect with the world of art (Sassen, 2011: 18). This cross-

⁴¹ Initially known as Scheryn Art Collectors Fund when it launched in 2015, it became Scheryn Art Collection Trust in 2017 after a restructuring.

⁴² Other art funds on the continent existed – the Changamoto Arts Fund in Kenya for example, was set up to help ease economic pressures for artists. But no other art investment funds assembling collections of African contemporary art and based on the African continent were known at the time of launch. Such funds are explained in Part II.

border geography also meant currency and exchange rate fluctuations became important valuation considerations as the research progressed (see 5.7.). The collection's acquisition filter of global appeal is largely because such artworks are more mobile, and thus more valuable, if they can also find resonance elsewhere – an interesting extension to the second key concept of mobility. More philosophically, it represents an idea of South Africa and the African continent as part of a global conversation based on multiplicity rather than nationalistic ideas of identity. Achille Mbembe, a philosopher and writer on postcolonial Africa, said in a public lecture on the politics of the imagination that, for a very long time, South Africa had tried to produce an idea of itself in two registers – the language of exceptionalism and of the miraculous. However, the country had discovered that after all it was an ordinary place (Mbembe, 2012). Indeed, a more global outlook would suggest a country (and continent) finding its place in the world, and artwork that reflected this phenomenon. As James Ngcobo, a theatre-maker, told a public panel: “We really need to get over ourselves and make theatre in a world space. We have to find a way to link our narrative to the narrative of the world.”⁴³

Internationally, contemporary art from the African continent is increasingly popular and Scheryn's stated expectation at outset was that the next five to ten years would see a large growth in demand.⁴⁴ African contemporary art was relatively cheap compared to European and American art, Steyn pointed out; some of the artworks, if produced elsewhere, would be multiples of the price they were available for in their home market (personal interview, 2016). Steyn added that the genre of African contemporary art was also diverse. Brett Scott, the Scheryn collection manager, said art production from Africa was strong and rooted in techniques and subject matter and the interest would not necessarily fade over time. Rather, the continent could increasingly set the terms of engagement: “Instead of being a section in a statement or conversation, we [can] actually start the conversation – it will be *our* conversation. We can generate it rather than being a side item” (personal interview, 2016).

The technical structure behind Scheryn is dealt with in Part II, below. However, a key feature of its operating mechanism is that members of the initiative can borrow

⁴³Comments drawn from *Making art across disciplines and geographic boundaries*. 23 February 2016. Johannesburg: Market Theatre Laboratory. Thembinkosi Goniwe, James Ngcobo, Jyoti Mistry and Gregory Maqoma moderated by Mary Corrigan. Author's notes.

⁴⁴ <http://scheryn.com/>

artworks back from the collection to the value of their initial investment. This effectively offers an aesthetic return of a revolving private or corporate collection to each member. Another related benefit for collectors is that acquisition and custodianship duties are managed by a professional team, reducing the administrative burden. The financial return would depend upon the revaluation of the collection over time. That said, the management company's approach to such returns was secondary and this became more pronounced over time. It was reflected by the fact that during the research period, not a single artwork was sold. Scheryn did not intend to flip artworks to distribute proceeds among its members, as a conventional art fund would do, and was instead focused upon building a reputable collection that held works long-term and its re-organisation in 2017 better reflected this aspiration. The philosophy was that revaluation of the portfolio would be sufficient basis from which to realise any required gains, particularly during the establishment phase. The situation was broadly comparable to a house purchase: equity in a house could feasibly be released, if the financial value of the house increased, without actually selling the property onwards. The equity release happens on revaluation alone and the house becomes a store of value.

How artworks were (re)valued thus became a key consideration in the research. The associated critique with any attempt to price fine art is its commodification, as opposed to a celebrated autonomy of art, or art for art's sake. These binaries are further engaged in Chapter 6, through a section on deriving value and the reconsideration of return. Suffice to say, "return" is approached in this case study much more broadly to include intangible and ephemeral characteristics, which will become evident as the chapter proceeds. This further informs the thesis conclusion, which rethinks artistic return in terms of (cultural) capital and (public) interest.

Scheryn's collection expanded significantly over the research period. In December 2015, three months after the research began, there were 21 artists represented and approximately 36 works in its portfolio. That total counts the multiple works in an edition (such as a series of prints) as a single artwork. The collection was at this point biased towards photography but also included sculptures, a tapestry, work on paper, work on glass, and painting. Two artworks were denominated in Dollars, one in Pounds, and one in Euros. A year later, at December 2016, that tally rose to 32 artists and 59 works, counted on the same basis. Twelve of these newly acquired works were

denominated in Dollars and one in Pounds. The medium bias remained photography (34%) but some of this actually represented documentation of performance work. Sculpture was not far behind (28%). Artist nationalities included South Africa, Kenya, Benin, Ghana, Zimbabwe, US, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo and Swaziland.

The internally calculated net asset value (NAV) of the collection's underlying fund at the end of the research period in December 2016 was R19.7 million (about £1.1 million or \$1.5 million). That figure excluded operating costs and liabilities but included payment for the works and transport, and almost doubled the fund's internally calculated value of R9.1 million a year prior. Soon after this revaluation, another private collector decided to join Scheryn. Piet Viljoen, with his own private collection of over 500 artworks of contemporary African art, was in early 2017 deciding which works would join Scheryn and on what basis. His subsequent decision to come on board, in his personal capacity, took the Scheryn initiative to a new level and the research period informally extended to cover this major revaluation event. Scott, the collection manager, anticipated the new artworks would be a significant improvement in the scope of the collection and fill in absences and sought-after artists (personal interview, 2016). By year-end 2017, when this process had resolved, Viljoen's additional artworks nearly trebled the value of the collection.⁴⁵

This case study followed the same methodology as August House, setting out to track artwork journeys and seek nodes of value transfiguration and their catalysts. The art would once more lead the way. As already outlined, the tracked acquisitions did not physically move very far once they were acquired; the majority were exhibited at the corporate premises of a co-founder and some remained in storage. This was because the collection was in its early stages. It had limited members to borrow artworks back for display and the collection was not yet large enough for curated exhibitions of its portfolio. More outward-facing engagements started to occur towards the end of the research period, as below. The point is that it became apparent, over time, that the 'thing' I was in fact following in the research was a collective process on dual tracks. These tracks comprised the assemblage of an art collection on the one hand, and its

⁴⁵ Viljoen ultimately added 236 of his artworks to the Scheryn collection, a move that helped increase the value of the entire portfolio of 316 artworks to R55.6 million at year-end 2017. This was calculated by using wall price as market price.

underlying structure on the other. Method had to innovate and respond flexibly to what was encountered. It began with the technical setup of the trust structure and, as the collection grew, the curation of the artwork portfolio became the focus.

The research period included 15 formal interviews with Scheryn affiliates and artworld experts, nine internal collection management meetings, a major auction, two related symposiums and various gallery visits. These observations were supplemented with mainstream and social media information pertaining to related artists and issues, the research equivalent to the August House passages and offspaces. The recent buy-in described above informally extended the research timeframe by four months to April 2017, when agreement with the new collector was reached in principle to join Scheryn. This disruptive buy-in event offered a neat bookend to the research topic and the thesis fieldwork at large.

Assembling an art collection is a complex and multifaceted process. Core logistics involve identifying, selecting, buying, transporting, handling, storing, insuring, exhibiting, and managing the buying and accession of artworks. That process includes authentication, issues of provenance, occasional framing, archiving, reproduction permissions, documentation and security. For exhibitions or loans, a duty of care extends to curation and all related aspects of getting a work to and from an exhibition. Works of fine art also need to be handled in a certain way to preserve their integrity, and the medium might have unusual properties that require careful conservation. These duties involve time and expertise. In fact, offering this suite of collection management services to third parties was part of the value-add that Scheryn intended to offer through its management company going forward. The costs and resources expended in artwork management constituted a skillset that Scheryn could feasibly provide as a bespoke service to third-party art collectors. Alternatively, third parties could bring their collection on board to pool with Scheryn and in this way benefit from economies of scale.

Scheryn Art Collection was structured by one of its independent advisors as a tree (see p.151). Its key branches comprised a few cornerstone works to which other artworks related. *Place of Totems* by Cecil Skotnes was one of these early cornerstone acquisitions. It was also the collection's most expensive purchase until Gerhard Marx was acquired during 2016: *Flightpath (Overlap Axis CT 1926)*. The latter is a mosaic

that comments on land issues. Partially, Marx was acquired for his links to Willem Boshoff, another branch of the tree that was added during the research period; Boshoff was formerly a teacher of Marx. His work was also acquired for its links to William Kentridge, an acquisition described as having cornerstone potential. Marx and Kentridge have collaborated on various projects including *Firewalker*, a well-known public sculpture in Johannesburg. Speaking in January 2016, Steyn reckoned he would need another year to get the collection right and its cornerstones in place and that is more or less how things transpired.

Ongoing research by Scheryn members informed acquisitions, which were largely conducted through galleries. The team met regularly, more or less every six weeks, to discuss potential artworks that were mooted by its two independent advisors as well as the collection manager. This process included feedback from art events like international fairs, biennales and exhibitions and an occasional review of holdings. Interconnections became more apparent as the research period progressed, including linkages between the case studies, which spoke to the key concept of the web. By way of example: in June 2016, an acquisition meeting discussed, among others, the Angolan artist Edson Chagas. A series of his prints depicting objects found on the streets of Luanda, sometimes repositioned, offered a playful take on an object and its context. The series took me back to August House and Venter's loft, where a Chagas poster of a found chair from this very same series was exhibited on her wall, among her art collection. The posters were distributed to visitors at the 2013 Venice Biennale, the same year Cape Town's new art museum Zeitz MOCAA bought the entire Angolan pavilion's Venice exhibition of Chagas works. In 2017, I myself picked up a Chagas take-home poster from this installation series at the opening of Zeitz.

Mostly, the artwork suggestions at acquisition meetings were couched in terms of their impact: "I was really taken aback by that"; "They have a great presence"; "If you walk into a space, you know it"; "My eye was drawn to them" (key meetings, 2016). Decisions were taken once availability and pricing of shortlisted works were ascertained. Comparative artworks in the secondary market (resale via auction) were factored into calculations to find fair value. But often such comparative information for works of contemporary art from the African continent was very limited or sample sales were too small. The process of ascertaining fair value, conducted by the

collection manager, also included comparison with contemporaries of the artist and primary art market information – such as the artist’s exhibition record, the type and calibre of shows, any institutional backing (museums and other non-commercial spaces), most recent sales. Once a decision for acquisition was made, negotiations ensued with the gallery or other artworld intermediary. Since the work would potentially be accessioned into a private collection, gallery discounts were often available. A reputable collection is a favourable destination for an artwork because it enhances the provenance through its formal accession and through future exhibitions or loans. It is also cared for in a professional way, which preserves its longevity, and formally documented. In addition to regular meetings, there were ongoing informal processes informing acquisitions that were more chance-driven, informed by research and broadly scanning the artworld. “I see things, hear about things, find things out and send people information, it’s an ongoing process,” as Steyn described it. Social media was also an important source. “I’ll look at it and suddenly it will send me on a tangent. That’s just the background [information] and then you have to start structuring things,” he added.

Once agreement was reached with an intermediary, the collection manager would attend to the logistics of the works being accessioned into the collection. For each acquisition, there was a detailed process as described above. Any overseas transactions made this process more complex, in particular the navigation of customs at port of entry. In one instance, an artwork made out of decommissioned weapons involved some deft administrative footwork. This less visible process and its paperwork was the responsibility of the collection’s management and it was also the area most people buying art in their personal capacity fell short on, Steyn observed.

Once accessioned, Scheryn’s artworks could in principle be borrowed back by its members, they could be loaned to exhibitions, or leased out to third parties. This potential for the artworks to move into public space was initially constrained during the foundation phase. As the collection matured, its mobility increased. The first public exhibition of a work in the Scheryn collection happened towards the end of the research period. Athi-Patra Ruga’s *The Glamoring of the Versatile Ivy* (Fig. 50), a tapestry Scheryn acquired from a commercial gallery during 2016, was included on an exhibition at Iziko South African National Gallery (SANG) called ‘Women’s Work’, which opened in December 2016. The same artwork then travelled to Paris for an

exhibition of contemporary African art, *Art/ Afrique: Le Nouvel Atelier*, at Louis Vuitton Foundation (26 April – 4 September 2017).⁴⁶ Such loans formed part of Scheryn's management strategy. Providing artworks for museum-quality exhibitions fulfilled an important role of the private collector as a custodian of cultural goods, making the work more widely available while also adding to its provenance and contextualisation. An artwork accrues provenance as it moves through different owners and contexts; this adds to the perceived significance of a work and hence its value.



Fig. 50: Athi-Patra Ruga's *The Glamoring of the Versatile Ivy* (2015) on exhibition at Iziko SANG.

During the research period, a comparable tapestry by Ruga, titled *Convention ... Procession ... Elevation*, outstripped all records for the artist by selling at auction in October 2016 for R477,456. This comparative price level in theoretical terms tripled the so-called market value of Scheryn's acquisition. Since there were not many point-of-sale references in the South African contemporary market, when an artwork came to auction it offered a new pricing benchmark – if the artist, style and medium were

⁴⁶ In November 2017, the same work was loaned to *What If The World* for a solo exhibition at its Cape Town gallery.

comparable (Scott, personal interview, 2016). Another Ruga tapestry sold by Aspire Art Auctions in March 2017, *Castrato as [the] Revolution*, sold for R261,464.

Besides these public exhibitions, Scheryn artworks were exhibited in the collection's build-up phase by Steyn, in line with borrowing benefits to members. The majority of these loaned works were installed at the various corporate offices of Steyn's work premises, Prescient Investment Management, primarily in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Other artworks were installed at his private residence in Cape Town. What became evident over the research period, however, was that the collection's artworks "moved" in an entirely different and more ephemeral sense.

In short, the artworks moved by proxy. Firstly, the constantly morphing lives of their makers meant that reputations and comparable artworks travelled along various trajectories in other contexts, and these trajectories impacted upon artworks held by the collection. I have detailed some examples in 5.3., tracking imbricated artwork journeys. Some of these related dynamics appeared random – a blend of fact, rumour, social media commentary, formal 'tastemakers', curation, comparable acquisitions, and more. But there was in fact a structuring at play in this network of value registrations. McKenzie Wark (2016), writing about value in a digital age, takes this kind of idea to its theoretical extreme, suggesting the artwork as a portfolio of simulation values. Wark writes that dematerialisation of the artwork and its ubiquity can be a kind of "distributed provenance" of which the artwork itself is the derivative. That is a provocative idea, elaborated upon in Chapter 6, that also suits contemporary conceptualism in the artworld. The point for the purposes of this chapter is that artworks had both an embodied trajectory of physical movement into particular contexts, as well as a spectral trajectory of movement by proxy.

In this way, the physical artwork could be understood as a locus of indexical value in a process of 'transvaluation' – that is, how the value potential generated by individual actions in the form of indexical cues accumulate as indexical value in various digital and physical objects (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016: 525). The same authors propose that circulation of objects is a crucial contributor to the systemic creation of value, connecting multiple actions performed by individuals across space and time to objects that circulate and carry indexical value with the collaborative network. Thus, forms of

value that are created by the actions of some participants become accessible to others (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016: 524).

Figueiredo & Scaraboto explain this kind of value scheme in more detail through three categories: initially, value emerges as a potential (field of possibilities); then value becomes indexical, acquiring different properties (storability and durability); finally, it becomes a value outcome of various types (for example hedonic, epistemic and linking) and ultimately assumes the form of microcultural values. These different forms of value integrate and shape each other in a process of systemic value creation; this “transmogrification of value” helps explain how value-creating actions performed at the individual level generate value outcomes and values for the entire network (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016: 529, added emphasis). The key point is that indexical value accumulates not only for individual artworks but potentially for a system as a whole.

By way of illustration, systemic creation of value may happen in an exhibition context where the appreciation of an artwork is informed by other comparable artworks and in turn informs a larger discourse. In this way, an artwork becomes both a locus of indexical value and in its circulation makes such value accessible to others. This has implications for the Scheryn case study research, which sets out to understand how artworks come to matter. They have their own agency, so their meaning can be read in a decontextualised ‘white-cube’ space; yet this meaning is also attenuated by Callon’s cross-pollinating agencies and arrangements, or *agencements*, as described earlier.

Another important proxy mobility for the collection’s artworks, in addition to distributed provenance, was ideas transference. This affecting aspect is always difficult to measure but acquiring art for its conceptual heft and meaning informed the collecting impulse. In earlier reflections on new materialism, Altieri mentioned the power of artworks to shift perspective by creating new structures to apprehend reality. This sentiment was expressed in various ways by the collection’s members. It became clear, for instance, when Steyn relayed the experience of viewing particular artworks on his regular international travels. One emblematic moment was his evocation of an installation by Richard Serra at the Guggenheim in Bilbao. “I walked into this and it changed what I think about things ... How can I incorporate that kind of thing into an office? What can I do? I can’t actually – but I *think* about it ... It creates sensation, it

creates awareness” (Steyn, personal interview, 2015). This comment connects back to Goniwe’s observations (p.21) that artworks are about ideas and, as such, they ask us to get out of ourselves. Most interlocutors in this case study felt the same way; they just expressed this impact differently. The power of the work to transport the viewer is the take-away, an intensive force Rolnik earlier described as *entorno*.

The Scheryn Art Collection was assembled parallel to the build-up of a major new museum of contemporary African art, Zeitz MOCAA, which opened in September 2017. Although the two collections were very different in scale and ambition, they both started life as private collections, they both focused upon contemporary African art, and they shared a similar ambition to validate on home soil the work of the continent’s artists. In this sense, they played a joint validation function in establishing a canon – particularly Zeitz MOCAA due to its sheer scale and public impact.

Situated at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town, the new museum comprises over 100,000 square feet, its interior carved from 42 former concrete grain silos. That includes nine floors and 80 galleries, with 6,500 square metres of white-cube space for its permanent collection and visiting shows. The museum was built on the back of a private collection and foundation belonging to Jochen Zeitz, former chair of Puma, and under the curatorship of Mark Coetzee⁴⁷. Zeitz MOCAA, however, calls itself a “public not-for-profit” institution. It has four founders (Zeitz, V&A Waterfront, Growthpoint, and the Public Investment Corporation which, among other things, invests the government’s pension plans), a board, and an extensive list of donors. These included Scheryn, which contributed an endowment and in exchange received naming rights in perpetuity for the museum’s temporary pavilion and the Centre for Performative Practice in the actual museum.

During the thesis research phase, Scheryn was considering the possibility of its own permanent space in future expansion plans. Privately funded public museums are part of an international trend: since 2000, more than 225 private museums of contemporary art have opened across the world (Pendle & Rocco, 2016: 21). There are 317 privately founded contemporary art museums in the world, according to Larry’s List.⁴⁸ Comparable African initiatives on the scale of Zeitz MOCAA include the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMVI) in Rabat,

⁴⁷ In May 2018, Mark Coetzee left Zeitz MOCAA.

⁴⁸ www.larryslist.com

Morocco that opened in 2014 and the Fondation Alliances' Contemporary African Art museum (MACAAL) in Marrakech, which formally opened in February 2018. It was generally expected the opening of Zeitz MOCAA would have a profound impact upon the local artworld and knock-on effects. Steyn anticipated Zeitz MOCAA would be part of a critical momentum of events and institutions. Cape Town would then become a global art destination and international galleries would take a stronger interest with the spotlight much more on African contemporary art and people reconsidering its value, he said. "You can already see, with [Zeitz MOCAA] coming, contemporary art is picking up and the old auction houses are struggling ... all the new money is not going to go there [Modernist art], it's too local" (personal interview, 2016).

He had a point. During the research period, a sculpture by Ghanaian artist El Anatsui sold at Sotheby's first London sale of African contemporary art for £728,750 (approximately R12,6 million), stealing the headlines. An article in the *New York Times* claimed this most likely signaled the beginning of more serious interest from western museums but also warned the continent itself would suffer owing to a lack of public art museums to showcase such work on home soil (Okeke-Agulu, 2017). The author's critique also drew a parallel between African contemporary art and urban neighbourhood gentrification: "Now that it is seen as high culture, the art and artists are gaining value, investors are jostling to get a piece of the action, and private collections are growing in Africa and around the world" (Okeke-Agulu, 2017). The article recommended African collectors and those based in Africa participated in the market, since their collections would stay on the continent. This would be one step towards a longer-term solution of better supported and managed public institutions (Okeke-Agulu, 2017). This raises an important point and also cues debate about the appropriate role of institutions as custodians of public goods, and public-private tensions in navigating that crossover territory.

The agenda for Scheryn's management team, looking ahead from year-end in December 2016, was to restructure the collection and exhibit its holdings more widely. Specifically on the 2017 action list was potential co-operation with wealth managers, progressing projects with international art institutions, leasing artworks, and increased media presence (key meetings, 2016).

a) An advisor's view

Amanda Botha, an author and consultant, is one of two independent advisors to Scheryn. The other advisor is Dale Washkansky, an artist and researcher. Both their words carried weight in acquisition decisions, and it was intended they would also be involved in future revaluation assessments. The tree structure for the collection was Botha's idea. Appreciating her viewpoint about how to value art is important to help understand the collection's approach, and this section sets out some key aspects.⁴⁹

Botha has over 50 years of experience in the South African art market, which she called "a long apprenticeship". This began with an internship at one of Cape Town's first art dealers, engaged primarily with Expressionists, where Botha came to know key artists while acquiring an overview of how the South African artworld worked and the market changed. Her recommendations for Scheryn focused upon 20th century artists she called 'blue chips', contenders for the collection cornerstones. These blue chips included artists like Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser, Alexis Preller and JH Pierneef, she said. They were scarce and in demand, and required insider knowledge to acquire. The contemporary art market, in Botha's view, only really developed in South Africa during the 1980s. A turning point was the centenary of Irma Stern's 1894 birth and a retrospective of her work in Germany with a comprehensive catalogue raisonné. "Suddenly South African art had an international flavour," Botha recalled. Another significant marker was the emergence of William Kentridge onto the global contemporary radar. Political circumstances also had a role to play because art was mobile.

African contemporary art is tricky to define and discern; there is also a lot of sentiment around it, which had "absolutely no value", Botha pointed out. Artists could also fall into a trap, producing more of what seemed to appeal. Such impact faded in weeks but people were misled, thinking they were in on something big. In reality, the majority of work sold today has no [financial] value, according to Botha's judgement. Most acquisitions, she predicted, would not earn back the price paid; further, only one [South African] commercial gallery still guarantees to buy back work it has sold. Botha has conducted a long-term study of artists emerging through tertiary art institutions, to test this theory and find out who to watch. "It's a sad tale," she said.

⁴⁹Comments in this section are drawn from two personal interviews (3 February 2016 & 26 May 2017).

“Ninety per cent of artists [of about 170] who graduated from 1985 to 1995 are not in the artworld. Amongst them are prizewinning artists as students or even very successful first solo exhibitions. They burn out. This is how tough it is.” Of those survivors, there were only six artists who came through strongly with international traction, in her review of the decade to 1995. These artists were: Gerhard Marx, Claudette Schreuders, Kendell Geers, William Kentridge, Marlene Dumas and Willem Boshoff.⁵⁰

Botha acknowledged there was room in the artworld for different kinds of collecting: “I think it’s a good thing that people produce art, and it’s good that people buy art.” That said, for a formal collection, it was no good to blindly follow the fashionable crowd. “You can buy it and enjoy it but that is not investment,” Botha offered. It was very difficult to identify artwork that would hold value in 10 or 20 years, she added. “It’s not about what you like. The majority of people’s instincts about what they like does not work. That is a golden rule. Neither is it about the story. It is about what will actually work and what will never age, what will actually grow. It’s the integrity of the work”. For these reasons, Botha said she was less interested in the price of a work as value indicator and more interested in how the artist had developed, in a broader artworld context.

Specifically, Botha recommends the Scheryn collection acquire “five-star work of three-star artists” rather than more works of lesser artists. In her view, this calibre of work would take 25-30 years to appreciate. In addition, a collection needs the best work of emergent artists (under 15 years of exhibition experience), where the expectation was lower and the value only showed after 30 years. The works should fit together in a weave or mosaic, she added, each relating to the other. That was also part of their value because artworks in a collection were held for their interrelationships: “A collection is work that connects with one another and serves in its totality, as a wholeness.”

Collecting thematically meant decisions had to be made about what constituted African contemporary art, followed by a focus upon particular periods. In Botha’s view, this process starts at the colonial period, moves into postcolonial histories from

⁵⁰ The Scheryn Art Collection bought three of these artists during the research period – Marx, Kentridge and Boshoff. It already held an artwork by Geers.

1956 onwards, and then new voices from the 1990s that relate to other traditions through the tree structure. She said it was important to contextualise an artist through antecedents and collect seminal examples of particular phases. A collection needs to have three key things in place: a collecting policy; an understanding of what a collection is as opposed to a compilation; and an understanding of aims. Artwork also needs to fit into the art market, be fit for sale, and have a value, Botha added. She described three types of value: market value as competitive value; ordinary commercial value as equivalent to the wall price in a gallery⁵¹; and emotional value comprising stories and feelings that surrounded a work. Provenance, the artist's explanations, and other anecdotal material were part of the latter.

Botha explained her structuring approach through the metaphor of a tree. The trunk comprised 20th century South African art and the core branches emerged from that, reflecting that an artist works in a context. The Expressionists were a major root of this tree: Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser and Wolf Kibel among them. Artists related to this root included Deborah Bell, William Kentridge and Robert Hodgins (who may qualify for his own branch). These artists have a more international quality. On another branch was Cecil Skotnes and the Polly Street artists including Ezrom Legae and Sydney Kumalo. A period from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s of South African modern art followed; Kevin Atkinson, Cecily Sash and Erik Laubscher were its most important figures. On the other side of the tree to the Modernists, Botha positioned the branch of Christo Coetzee. "Going up, you then have a new generation, a proven generation, of those people [in the tree]," she added. Kendell Geers and Willem Boshoff lay to either side of the trunk; Gerhard Marx related to both Boshoff and Kentridge, as described earlier. The tree must also have sprouts, as Botha put it, good work from early artists and space for some artists who did not fit specifically on any branch. Her advice was not to buy artists and then wonder where they might fit in the tree; rather buy to populate the tree structure. Botha said: "This is in a nutshell the best of twentieth century art. If you've got good work ... a good balance, how these works interrelate because context is also important, then you have got an excellent collection ... That is already proven value. You can sell it on the international market."

⁵¹ Artist's price plus gallery commission.

Botha thought Scheryn was doing something quite new with its collection. Corporate collections had a different kind of mandate so certain private collections were comparable. The three biggest private collections in South Africa, she pointed out, were all based in Cape Town. The Rupert Collection of Anton and Huberte Rupert began in the 1940s and in 2017 comprised over 35,000 artworks and six museums around the world. Anton Rupert was the founder of the Rembrandt Group, an industrial and branded goods conglomerate. The Rupert Museum in Stellenbosch showcases part of the Rupert's collection – artworks created from 1940 to 1970. The Frank and Lizelle Kilbourn Collection, comprising over 1,000 works, probably has the highest value, Botha says. Frank Kilbourn was founder of the Bright Group of companies, focused on private equity and venture capital, and more recently became chairman of Strauss & Co, an auction house. During the research period, the Kilbourns bought *The Two Arabs* by Irma Stern for R25 million. At the time, this was the highest price paid for a South African artwork at auction. The Kilbourn collection also put on a rare exhibition during 2016 of some of its artworks, at Welgemeend estate in Cape Town. The exhibition included works from the Welgemeend permanent collection, assembled by Izak Wilhelmus "Boerneef" van der Merwe, a poet. And finally, the Wiese private collection, also in Cape Town, comprises over 2,000 works. Christo Wiese is a businessman and one of South Africa's wealthiest individuals, largely from consumer retail. "If you put that together, can you see how difficult it is to get works of quality?" Botha adds. "If they sell, they put it on auction."

Botha's views on value are helpful to consider how the collection approached the question of which artworks mattered. Key observations included the underlying structure of Botha's tree, in particular how artworks have added value (meaning) because their branches interrelate and how they all contribute to the whole. This emphasis on interrelationships represents the third key concept of the web. The same kind of logic infuses curatorial practice. Artworks on exhibition are juxtaposed in very particular ways in order to either surface or elide points of correspondence and negation. Over and above the merit of individual works, a storyline is created that takes the viewer on another kind of conceptual journey from the connections made possible by these juxtapositions. This is primarily an aesthetic consideration that informs any grouping of artworks but there is also a financial aspect to this kind of value-add. For instance, Scheryn would in some instances favour buying an entire

series of an artwork rather than just one individual piece from a series. This is because there is more significance to holding an entire set. This aesthetic significance is, however, also translated into financial terms if that series were to be sold onwards. This meaning derived from interrelationships is more common in the artworld from the 1990s, in a phenomenon Nicolas Bourriaud described as postproduction, “an ever increasing number of artworks ... created on the basis of pre-existing works ... to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age” (2000: 7).

Botha’s tree, rooted in South African Modernists, reflects her key reference point for African contemporary art. The definition does not have shared premises, however, and the tagline itself is contested (see 5.4.). My own view during the research period was that performance art was at the cutting edge of contemporary expression in South Africa, and potentially more broadly than that. Part of the reason performance art was so provocative in expressing the zeitgeist was its ephemerality and hence resistance to capture – financially or otherwise. This refusal could be interpreted as a riposte to broader financialisation of the artworld, where this thesis began its research rationale. Performance is difficult but not impossible to collect. Some artists like Tino Sehgal, based in Berlin, have famously sold performance art using only verbal contracts; his ‘constructed situations’ are played out through artist-led authorisations. But this is an extreme case. Mostly, performance art can be collected through documentation and Scheryn included various examples (Robin Rhode, Leonce Agbodjelou and Athi-Patra Ruga among them). Documentation can also be contested terrain because the singularity of performance is often entwined with its ephemerality. Performativity, reflected in the collection’s thematics, was flagged in Chapter 1 as part of a broader discussion around mobility and will be picked up in the artwork trajectories detailed below.

b) A collector’s view

The first artwork that Piet Viljoen acquired for his personal collection was a maquette of Brett Murray’s sculpture, *Africa* (2000). The original bronze sculpture stands in public space along the pedestrianised St George’s Mall in Cape Town, and is the winner of a public art competition. It takes the form of a stereotypical ‘African’ figurative sculpture sprouting Bart Simpson heads like tumours of reverse cultural appropriation. Its location happened to be right outside the Investec office entrance

where Viljoen worked at the time. He is currently the chairman, and founder, of Regarding Capital Management (RECM). As Viljoen explains, it was during the late 1990s, during the technology stocks bubble, and his investment stance as a fund manager was contrarian to the prevailing view. He used an image of Murray's sculpture as backdrop during one of his presentations to clients: "It speaks to the old and the new; the more things change, the more they stay the same [the idea] we need to stay grounded, it isn't all different, this too will pass." That presentation proved fairly prescient, as the technology boom did indeed pass and left some casualties in its wake. Viljoen was told after one such presentation that he could buy the *Africa* maquette from a nearby gallery and his collection of over 500 artworks thus began. "I saw all this art in the gallery and it just spoke to me and that was the start."⁵² Once again, Goniwe's observation about the power of artworks as ideas, that ask us to get out of ourselves, is pertinent. Significantly, it was the communicative, metaphorical force of an artwork that first got Viljoen interested in contemporary art, and that segued into assembling one of the country's most significant private collections.

This anecdote about the *Africa* sculpture helps to understand Viljoen's collecting ethos, as Scheryn's newest member and a collector in his own right. In April 2017, Viljoen decided he would join Scheryn, and almost half his collection would follow in due course. He felt that a key benefit of Scheryn was scaling collection management and shared expertise – the bigger the collection, the lower the unit cost of managing it. "For me, that is the upside – not the fact that I'm going to make money out of it because I doubt it." In fact, Viljoen was a skeptic on the idea of art as investment. "I don't think it's a fantastic store of monetary value on average ... I think it's an important good that we need as human beings but that is something very different." As the Scheryn Collection became more established, along with its collecting ethos, Viljoen felt more common ground to participate and eventually made the decision to join the initiative.

Viljoen, like Steyn, works in the investment management sector. In this role, Viljoen is a value investor, which means he aims to buy good assets cheaply. If there is a mispricing, he waits for that to recalibrate and reap the benefit. His art collection

⁵² Comments in this section are drawn from a personal interview (7 December 2016).

works on a very different idea of value, however. “With art, I look for something that appeals to me, that speaks to me, and that I think has value for society.” To demonstrate this difference: intrinsic value of an asset, in investment terms, is the present value of the future cash flow an asset would generate over its lifetime. Artwork has negative cash flow for a very long time; it might have a positive cash flow if you sold, said Viljoen, but mostly the cost of storing, insuring and other expenses kept that in negative territory. “I think no art has intrinsic value as defined in the investment world. The net present value – if you calculate all the negative cash flows plus the positive one at the end – is probably zero and maybe even negative. Some will be very positive but most on average are negative.” Good art, in contrast, has massive societal intrinsic value and these different concepts had to be defined, he added.

Interestingly enough, an artwork in Viljoen’s collection by Njideka Akunyili Crosby later increased dramatically in value by virtue of the artist’s reputation reaching new stellar heights. A different artwork by Crosby was put on auction for the first time in New York, in November 2016. In about one month, her work went from being valued at \$100,000 to \$1.1 million when it sold at the Sotheby’s auction (at three times the high estimate). This price hike was partly the result of careful management by her gallery, which sold only to museums and thus ensured a very particular provenance, boosted also by winning an important artworld prize. “It can’t just produce itself,” Steyn said of this kind of trajectory. Viljoen paid R400,000 for his Crosby artwork in late 2014, and he thought the work was comparable to the one sold at Sotheby’s. A rational investor might now put that artwork on the market, Viljoen noted, but he said art was not rational. Viljoen will only sell mistakes – an artwork that does not fit his private collection, or perhaps the artist’s trajectory does not go anywhere. On average, he said there was very little financial upside to collecting – although this one Crosby work would now make a difference.

With respect to increased global interest in African contemporary art, Viljoen conceded the artworld was cyclical and every now and then latched onto something. But he thought good quality art coming out of South Africa and elsewhere was well priced with world-class examples. Time also acted as a sifting mechanism; looking back after 40 years offered a perspective on which artworks held value. Early contemporary art – like Christo Coetzee and Walter Battiss – were influential on what

was happening today, so some Modernist artworks were also relevant. He said his own private collection broadly asks questions, such as “who are we?” and “what are we about?” – as human beings, South Africans, Africans. Viljoen made his collection publicly accessible for a few years through a museum called The New Church, which ran independently curated shows. For various reasons, including lack of sufficient public interest, the museum closed. That said, Viljoen perceives his art collector role as being a custodian of public goods: “Art has to be seen not to be locked away.”

When it came to ideas around uncertainty, the first key concept in the thesis, Viljoen shared with Steyn a view that macro events in the broader world could not be anticipated. He would rather play the cards he was dealt than guess what the other cards were, he said. “It doesn’t worry me in my investments and it doesn’t worry me in art either ... If you base your art-buying investments on your view of what the future is going to be like, you are going to be wrong most of the time because nobody knows.” Rather, art had to be acquired for its own reasons – stand on its own two legs, as Viljoen described it, and reflect what was happening in the world. This perspective, with its correspondence to the artist’s openness to flux, is developed further in Chapter 5’s closing considerations about structural thinking.

5.3. Tracked artworks

This section moves from the more general aspects of the Scheryn Art Collection towards specificity by profiling six of the artworks Scheryn acquired during the research period. The artworks were selected because the artists had a link to August House. This connection to the previous case study was a deliberate effort to demonstrate the intertextuality of the artworld, and how a web of meaning is constructed from such linkages. These threads stitch a storyline together in the weave that Botha described, which becomes more meaningful with insider knowledge. That is also part of the delight in assembling a collection held together by myriad interrelationships, as Bié Venter’s collection in her August House loft suggested. The six artworks have been profiled using examples of indexical cues described earlier in this chapter, to make explicit how artworks can move by proxy. These cues include exhibitions, awards, reviews, events, and other considerations past and present which have informed the trajectories of comparable works, or their artists. These cues are accumulated as indexical value in the artwork itself, as Figueiredo & Scaraboto

suggested (2016: 525) – a form of distributed provenance. I viewed such events as nodes of value transfiguration, or ‘transvaluation’ (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016: 525), where value potential generated by individual actions accumulate in the artwork, and perhaps even the system. This movement by proxy reflects the second key concept of mobility and offers a different understanding of what mobility might mean.

The artist profiles, below, juxtapose information from the past and the present, to emphasise how such interconnects accrue and resonate over time.⁵³ These kinds of juxtapositions are important because acquiring a work of art is different to acquiring another kind of consumer good. For one thing, the buyer is arguably more like a custodian taking care of an artistic artefact that has an import and relevance hinged to a larger cultural commons. There are other entanglements. The artist has an ongoing relationship with the work, with moral authority vested in it, and certain copyright claims. In addition, as Canice Prendergast points out (2014: 8), “valuation of an artwork often depends critically on what an artist does before and after [acquisition]”; and understanding the quality of an artwork can be informed by observing other works. Further, the artist’s name acts as a kind of brand in an uncertain transaction, making a purchase of their work akin to taking an equity stake in the artist (Prendergast, 2014: 8). This observation has an interesting parallel to Scheryn, whereby its members effectively own a stake in each artwork through a fractal group membership structure. The significance of this structure will be addressed later.

By way of explanation, the profiled artworks below also implicate myself in systemic circulations of the artworld, however limited, with citations of earlier art-related writing. This gesture is intended as a self-reflexive critique of the structures that collaborate to make artists more or less visible in artworld circulations. Cultural translators, or what Petterson calls ‘tastemakers’, possess knowledge of philosophy and art theory to evaluate art, and their actions increase the probability an artist will be successful in future (Petterson, 2014: 69). Such translators are part of a microsystem that directly impacts the artist’s development, in turn a function of both cultural and economic value: “To understand the inherent risk in the art market is to

⁵³ An ellipsis is employed in the formatting to indicate a temporal shift.

study and monitor the actions, relationships and dynamics within this ecosystem” (Petterson, 2014: 67).

The six selected artists are all South African. Is that a fair sample for a portfolio that collected African contemporary art? South African art is a key reference for investment-grade art from the continent, according to Botha. Facts and figures bear this out. The *Africa Art Market Report 2014* ranking of Top 100 artists was dominated by South Africans (40 out of 100 artists) with Nigerian artists second (12 out of 100) (Aka, 2015). The biased geographical selection serves the broader purpose, to demonstrate other ideas of mobility and how art comes to matter. The selected artists are also globally engaged and their work could be understood as emblematic.

a) *Debt Trap I* (2010)

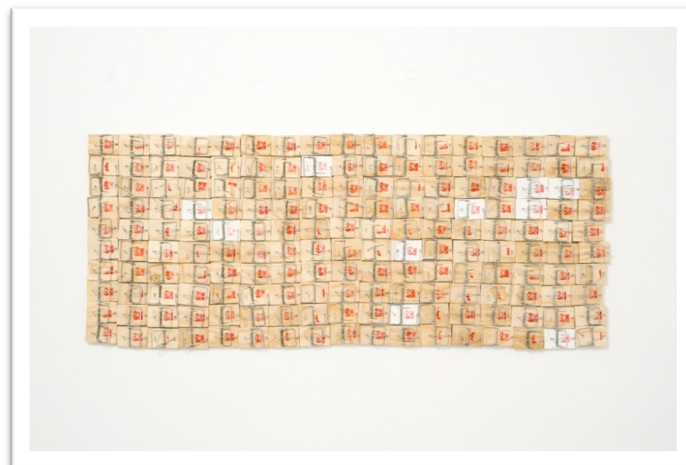


Fig. 51: *Debt Trap I* (2010). Courtesy: Brundyn Gallery.

Gugulective
Wood and wire
279 x 162.8cm
Installation
Location: Prescient Group

Kemang Wa Lehulere was a founding member of the art collective called Gugulective, which created *Debt Trap I*. These days, he is better known as an individual practitioner. But Wa Lehulere started his art practice as part of collectives, including one that was based at August House. In a recent opening of a major touring exhibition for the Standard Bank Young Artist award, *History will Break your Heart*, at Iziko South African National Gallery in 2015, he credited these collective roots for shaping his trajectory. Recently, a spate of collectives has been gaining ground in

Cape Town: among them Burning Museum, Cass Collective and iQhiya. Their increased visibility demonstrates collectivity as a key artistic response to uncertainty.

I first met Wa Lehulere several years ago to write a profile about him when he was still a student, in 2009, excerpted below.

When we meet, Wa Lehulere has just returned from a Berlin arts festival as part of *Gugulective*, a group he helped found. Its members decided to make work in their location, Gugulethu, rather than always having to travel into the city's cultural locus. Among other things, Gugulective operates a gallery out of a shack next to a shebeen. But more of that later.

For one of his Berlin performances, Wa Lehulere dressed barefoot in a charcoal coat and ritualistically sharpened with a blade over 200 pencils. He threw some to the ground and stuck the rest in his hair, to a soundtrack of amplified combing. The absurd result was a direct reference to the apartheid-era 'pencil test', which sought to classify people according to the pencil-holding properties of their hair.

Hair as a signifier of identity recurs more obliquely in another performance piece Wa Lehulere enacted last year [2008] outside the above-mentioned Gugulethu gallery. The artist dug a hole his own size with an afro comb. During the three-day gruel, he precipitously struck skeletons that turned out to be those of cows buried in the shebeen property many years earlier. This chance discovery in turn triggered related recollections from the community – and ideas for new artworks.

Afro combs also feature in a few sketches pinned to Wa Lehulere's studio wall: one character has feet of combs. Others have enlarged thumbs – a reference to his aunt, seriously injured in 1976 protest riots, who was identified severely debilitated in a hospital some time later by the particular shape of her thumb. The drawings are studies for a solo exhibition this year [2009] at the Association for Visual Arts in Cape Town.⁵⁴

This profile foregrounds some relevant observations: the importance of the studio as a way to appreciate an artist's work; artist-led collectives; and how the story behind the artwork helps to appreciate thematic concerns in an artist's oeuvre. The same aunt who is referenced with the misshapen thumb, Sophia Lehulere, also featured in *History will Break your Heart*. There, she collaborated on a series of chalk drawings. Such backstories make possible more nuanced readings of artworks.

The next time I saw Wa Lehulere, in 2011, he was sitting at a makeshift table in Doornfontein, reciting testimony from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a series of public hearings convened at the end of apartheid to address gross violations of human rights. On the table in front of him were ritualistic objects

⁵⁴ Gurney, K. 2009. Doing It His Way. *Destiny*. Art & Culture Supplement – Rising Stars. Bryanston: Ndalo Media. January/ February: 6.

instead of wares for sale. His performance was part of a commemorative intervention on this street corner. *Na Ku Randza* marked the corner spot where musician Gito Baloi was shot dead in 2004, described in Chapter 4. Other interventions for *Na Ku Randza* included painting a commemorative mural, chalking up bullet trajectories on the roadside, printing anti-xenophobic T-shirts for giveaways, and handing out roses to passersby. The intervention was intended to evoke memory and violence at the same time.

Na Ku Randza was organised by the Center for Historical Reenactments, a former August House tenant. Wa Lehulere was a founding member. The pink elephant mascot, standing on its perch above a corner store, was central to the concept of this inner-city intervention. The elephant iconography marked a defunct chain of liquor stores (“seeing pink elephants” is a euphemism for drunken hallucinations). Its oval eyes were frozen in an expression of perpetual surprise. The pink elephant also marked a site of trauma as the silent witness to Baloi’s murder. It was perfectly visible from August House rooftop. Then, shortly after the building changed hands, it mysteriously disappeared.



Fig. 52: Wa Lehulere (left) in *Na Ku Randza* (2011), Doornfontein.

Before it went missing, the pink elephant was taken in 2013 to New York as part of CHR's installation at the New Museum, *After After Tears*. "After tears" refers to the traditional gathering after a funeral. In NYC, the elephant likewise marked a place of trauma – it commemorated the building where the South African exiled writer Nat Nakasa fell to his death in 1965. When the elephant returned to its inner-city position, it was standing back to front. Its rear end faced August House instead of its raised trunk. Later, it vanished. And CHR committed what it called institutional suicide, in 2012. The pink elephant lived on in the CHR logo (Fig. 54).

To accompany the CHR installation *After After Tears*, Wa Lehulere presented a lecture performance that considered the metaphor of falling. For the artist, "to fall not only signals a physical or ideological ending (to fall to one's death or the fall of a regime) but also an intensification of desire (to fall in love), bringing to bear the entangled conditions of life, death, love, and resistance", according to the New Museum's website.⁵⁵ Wa Lehulere structured the performance around instances of falling drawn from CHR's two years of activity in addition to art historical precedents and events key to rethinking South Africa's past, the New Museum states. Staged for a small number of guests, the performance recast this space of public viewing as one of intimate observance that resonated with other works in the gallery, it adds: "In this moment after CHR's death, Wa Lehulere contemplates what it means for an institutional body that cannot live yet never dies." This contemplation links back to the neverendings of August House that Chapter 4 described.

Gugulective continued its existence. On 9 August 2016, a day of public art in Langa was curated by Khanyisile Mbongwa, a member of Gugulective. Mbongwa described the event in a related statement as "premised on memory, lived experiences and educated hope in the quest to cultivate the art of living [not dying]". It was also about drawing a line between the anti-apartheid youth protests of 16 June 1976 and the recently convened student uprising, the *Rhodes Must Fall* movement. Wa Lehulere, meanwhile, peeled off from collectives and set out on a solo career that had a spectacular ascent during the research period. On the heels of the Standard Bank award, he won the Deutsche Bank Artist of the Year in 2017, which provided him

⁵⁵ <http://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/188/a-performance-by-kemang-wa-lehulere>

with his first institutional show in Germany. That followed his first US museum show, at the Art Institute of Chicago, *In All My Wildest Dreams*. Wa Lehulere's works were also exhibited at the Stevenson gallery in Cape Town, with new trajectories clearly evident in his show, *Never ending dead-end*.



Fig. 53



Fig. 54

In October 2017, Wa Lehulere co-curated an exhibition at the new A4 Arts Foundation in Cape Town, entitled *You & I*. The Gugulective work *Debt Trap I* formed part of this show. The work was initially exhibited at a Goodman Gallery exhibition in 2010 entitled *Ityala aliboli/ Debt don't rot*, which engaged economic crisis in South Africa. Specifically, that exhibition pointed out the prevailing realities for the majority and what the artistic collective called abstracted violence, whereby economic structures in post-apartheid South Africa remained for a privileged minority. The work comprised a number of mousetraps, bearing state insignia from the apartheid era, to indicate that current society must pay the debt of the past regime – in effect, a debt trap. *Debt Trap I* belonged to a body of work that included large-scale prints of old South African banknotes including the image of Dutch colonialist Jan van Riebeeck, superimposed with lines of people queuing. An edition of these banknote prints was also acquired by Scheryn.



Fig. 55: *Debt Trap I* exhibited at A4 Arts Foundation, October 2017.

b) *Peripheral Thought No. 1* (2015)

The artwork, *Peripheral Thought No. 1*, is a tapestry acquired by Scheryn as a key branch in its tree. The work depicts puppet-like protagonists against a backdrop of a traditional map; the figures appear to negotiate a loaded territory. Elements of labour and aspiration are connoted by the medium of a mohair tapestry; this is juxtaposed with a desire for freedom – “unbind the feet” as the wording reads. The artist, William Kentridge, has a Johannesburg studio in Maboneng in a creative hub including studios and galleries, just a few streets away from August House. Kentridge was one of the first movers and investors into Maboneng’s Arts on Main precinct, the anchor development for Propertuity.



Fig. 56: William Kentridge, *Peripheral Thought No. 1* (2015). Image: Goodman Gallery.

William Kentridge
Edition of 6
270 x 330cm
Mohair tapestry
Location: Prescient Group

An article for the *Sunday Times* published 13 years ago, excerpted below, backgrounds Kentridge's oeuvre and demonstrates recurrent thematics. *Nine Drawings for Projection*, first exhibited at Spier estate in 2004, brought together a collection of Kentridge's films from 1989 to 2003.

William Kentridge, one of South Africa's most famous and influential artists, told delegates last year at a Cape Town conference that prints left a 'snail's trail' over time – a visible trace or visual representation of an artist's progress. Over the past 14 years, Kentridge has created a series of animated short films that in much the same way leave visible traces of his own art-making ... Film gives artists a way of making tangible the usually invisible process of art-making and Kentridge uses that to great effect. In 1995, he began to record changes in his drawings by filming them. While documenting the life of the drawing itself, this also led to his animations for which he is world renowned. His highly regarded films have showcased at top museums, galleries and arts festivals around the globe, cementing a formidable international reputation.

... A black cat, for example, makes repeated appearances in various guises, from a benevolent presence around Eckstein to the transition of a camera tripod into a cat. Themes, like the procession of people, are also repeated. Theatrical staging and music always inform his films. And elements of other art forms – from puppetry to sculpture, drawing and etching – are used throughout. This juxtaposition is at times jarring,

underscoring the sense of unease, while at other times it is incongruously comical in a macabre way.⁵⁶

In late 2016, I visited Whitechapel Gallery in London to see a Kentridge solo exhibition entitled *Thick Time*. It was the first major showing of his work in the UK for 15 years, according to Whitechapel. The first room was an immersive procession comprising video projections, sound and sculptural installation, and thematics referenced above. At its centre was a mechanical object contracting and expanding, an animated apparatus. Two-dimensional scenarios played themselves out on walls constructed from crates. This projection ended with a procession shifting from celebratory to burdened, with a closing narrative ambiguity. The final room in the exhibition was an installation about the artist's studio process, linking us back to Chapter 4 where Kentridge articulated the studio as a place where the making could jump ahead of the thinking.

In 2017, Kentridge opened a new interdisciplinary space, The Centre for the Less Good Idea, linked to that very idea. Its name derived from a Tswana proverb – if the best doctor cannot cure you, try the second best. It followed the notion that art often emerged from second attempts and false starts. “Often, you start with a good idea. It might seem crystal clear at first, but when you take it to the proverbial drawing board, cracks and fissures emerge in its surface, and they cannot be ignored. It is in following the secondary ideas, those less good ideas coined to address the first idea's cracks, that the centre nurtures, arguing that in the act of playing with an idea, you can recognise those things you didn't know in advance but knew somewhere inside you”.⁵⁷ Kentridge elaborated in a radio interview that this new centre should also be a safe space for things not to work. Often, he said, the proposal stage was the death of an idea because the artist had to say exactly how it would work; there was little space for uncertainty about how it would work in practice.⁵⁸ The format of production in his new centre was structured as five months of making and five days of presenting to the public. Kentridge described this public presentation as pressure on the cooking to help make something happen.

⁵⁶ Gurney, K. 21 March 2004. Still life in motion. *Sunday Times Lifestyle*. 21 March: 7.

⁵⁷ <https://lessgoodidea.com/#/865004006353/>

⁵⁸ SAFM, 25 February 2017. Author's notes.

Kentridge was a key example in the Scheryn collection of an artist with global reach. He came relatively late to the artworld, with a grounding first in theatre. His artworks retain something of this cinematic flair. For instance, during the research period, Kentridge opened *Triumph and Laments*, a 500-metre long frieze in Rome that was created by erasures from the biological patina on the waterfront embankment. Ten-metre high figures in procession depicted Rome's greatest victories and defeats. A theatrical event with composer Philip Miller was also staged with the procession as backdrop. In October 2016, at the inaugural Aspire auction in Johannesburg, Kentridge's *Untitled (Colonial Landscape)*, a 1996 work of charcoal and pastel, sold for over R2 million. Global status was underscored in May 2017 when Kentridge was awarded an Asturias prize by Spain – an annual prize handed out by a foundation named for Crown Princess Leonore. The prize recognised notable achievements in the sciences, humanities and public affairs.

c) *Praça de Touros V* (2013)

Nandipha Mntambo, an artist originally from Swaziland, has increasing international traction with her artwork. The profile, excerpted below, was written when she was newly graduated from UCT's Michaelis School of Fine Art. Her work was acquired by Iziko South African National Gallery directly from her graduate show.

Graduate shows are traditionally combed by talent-spothers and Mntambo was last year singled out. Her work conveyed strong visual impact, technical skill and conceptual depth along with its striking medium. Mntambo moulded partial casts of female figures in cow hides, which were inspired by a dream and picked for their multifarious cultural associations. The preposterous but successful proposition of sultry female figures covered in long hair was both attractive and repulsive.

In the centre, a woman crouched on all fours. A series of five figures hung like clothes in a cupboard and a torso from the wall. Three pairs of crossed legs sat on high chairs as a comment on female interaction. Mntambo says: "It's about how females are 'supposed' to behave towards each other. A lot of people prefer to remain silent or watch from a distance because it is safer ... It also challenges stereotypes of what women should look like – the hairy wife or girlfriend. It's both disturbing and sexy."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Gurney, K. 2004. Hirsute divas. *Art South Africa*. 3(3). Bell-Roberts: Cape Town. Available: <http://artafricamagazine.co.za/march-2005/> [2017, July].

Praça de Touros V was performed in Maputo in Mozambique and addressed the colonial hold of Portugal through the figure of the matador, subverting its traditionally masculine associations. The artist trained with a bullfighter in Portugal in preparation. The conceptual concerns from her student body of work, created about a decade earlier, were clearly evident. Mntambo dressed in animal hide in the performance, linking back to the moulded cow hides that first got her noticed by the artworld.



Fig. 57: *Praça de Touros V* (2013). Courtesy: Zeitz MOCAA.

Nandipha Mntambo

Edition: 9/100

Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper

Image: 45 x 45cm; Paper: 50 x 50cm

Photography

Location: Prescient Group

In 2017, Mntambo had a studio in Ellis House in New Doornfontein. This former textiles factory, Bentex, was a successor art hub that emerged in the August House wake – one of the popping seeds, which Diane Victor talked about. Some of the August House diaspora moved to Ellis House, starting with Fine Art Logistics. Later, Dorothee Kreutzfeldt joined and along with other artistic tenants they soon turned the building into an art hub. This included a residency space, a project space, and a gallery in addition to individual studios and other kinds of small enterprises.

At the Cape Town Art Fair in February 2017, Mntambo was featured by Zeitz MOCAA as one of three artists in a preview of its September 2017 official opening. A triptych of Mntambo's work was titled *Early career retrospective* and dated 22 September 2017 – 27 January 2018, in anticipation of the Zeitz MOCAA opening event. The work featured Mntambo in a Spanish bullring, an extension of the *Praça de Touros* series. The other two artists flagged for the opening event were Edson Chagas and Kudzanai Chiurai (Kudzi) – both of whom we met in Chapter 4. Chiurai was described by a Scheryn art advisor as “one of the most important artists of this generation” (key meetings, 2017).



Fig. 58: Nandipha Mntambo at the Zeitz MOCAA booth, Cape Town Art Fair (2017).

The Scheryn artwork of Mntambo is a print in an edition of 100 – it is less valuable from an originality point of view but nonetheless it successfully indexes the practice of a rising talent. By way of comparison: in March 2017, the inaugural Aspire Cape Town auction sold *Praça de Touros IV* (a triptych) for R125,048, an auction record for the artist and substantially above pre-sale estimates of R30,000-R50,000. More specifically, another edition of Scheryn's acquisition sold at Aspire for R23,420; this revalued Mntambo's work at four times its acquisition price.

d) *Untitled* (2010)



Fig. 59: Mohau Modisakeng, *Untitled* (2010). Image: Brundyn Gallery.
Mohau Modisakeng
Inkjet print on watercolour paper
108 x 170cm (each)
Location: Prescient Group

Mohau Modisakeng worked in a studio at August House for a brief period. He also made a performance work on a building site that had been reduced to a pile of rubble nearby the atelier. A rehearsal *Dikubu*⁶⁰ was held in July 2012 at The Parking Gallery, temporarily hosted at the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) premises in Maboneng. The Parking Gallery, curated by the artist Simon Gush, used to run from the Louisar building in Doornfontein; as Chapter 4 mentions, Venter first spotted August House from that site. Another August House link is that Jacki McInnes, a former tenant, included Modisakeng in a show she co-curated during the research period – *End Times* at Wits Art Museum (2016). She exhibited three works from Modisakeng's *Untitled* (2010); Scheryn owns a work from this same series.

Modisakeng was chosen as one of two artists to represent South Africa at the Venice Biennale in 2017. The other artist was Candice Breitz. Modisakeng exhibited in

⁶⁰ Dikubu is a Setswana word for the South African-made cattle prod, or sjambok.

Venice a triple-channel projection *Passage* that related to slavery's dismemberment of African identities and erasure of personal histories. His work has previously dealt with different violences, as excerpted below.

This kind of register is echoed by other artists working in the literal fabric of Johannesburg inner city with its distinctive sights and sounds, turning its performative nature back on itself. Mohau Modisakeng in 2012 hosted a performance along End Street that formed part of a series of public interventions. This particular manifestation occurred on the site of a collapsed building that had earlier been gutted by fire, leaving a stark frame of heritage architecture behind. In its first partial collapse, two scrap recyclers inside the building at the time were killed. Its subsequent razing left a pile of fenced-back rubble. The work comprised a dozen men positioned on this site, each holding a sjambok, which is a traditional South African weapon akin to a whip. They synchronised their movements, creating 'a rich sonic environment in combination with rough choreography and music'. Modisakeng explores violence as a mediator of history and his performances often use its instruments, specific to the South African context to re-enact its symbolism.⁶¹

In an early interview, Steyn said: "Mohau, I think, is going to be a star" (personal interview, 2016). "He's got this thing about him. I think he is going to be great." Indeed, Modisakeng was declared the Standard Bank Young Artist for Visual Art in 2016. The following year, in addition to representing South Africa at the Venice Biennale, he was selected as the featured artist of the Joburg Art Fair 2017. The increased value of his artwork was evident at Aspire's inaugural auction, when *Ditaola XV* sold for R204,624.

Incidentally, a sculptural installation by Modisakeng entitled *Ihawu* (2013) was temporarily installed outside the Scheryn Pavilion, the temporary pavilion for Zeitz MOCAA during its construction phase. The pavilion carried the naming rights of the new collection as part of a sponsorship deal. *Ihawu* is part of a series initiated by Zenprop Property Holdings, an international property development and investment company.

⁶¹ Gurney, K. 2013. Sounding the City: Urban Performance in Johannesburg. *Kunstforum* (223), Oct-Dec: 94-107.

e) *Her Majesty Queen Sophie* (2009)



Fig. 60: Mary Sibande, *Her Majesty Queen Sophie* (2009). Courtesy: Gallery MOMO.

Mary Sibande
Edition: 7 of 10
Digital pigment print
105 x 69cm
Photography
Location: Prescient Group

Mary Sibande lived and worked in August House, together with her partner Lawrence Lemaoana, who is also a successful practising artist. Sibande temporarily vacated to Laub Street in Selby when the building was put up for sale, and later found new premises on End Street. During the research period, a Sibande sculpture of her alter ego *Sophie* took up residence in part of Sibande's parking bay in the August House basement, as excerpted below and pictured earlier (Figs. 21-23).

The parking bay belonging to Mary Sibande and Lawrence Lemaoana has an old Volkswagen Beetle that hasn't moved in months. In front of the Beetle stands a life-size figure of Mary's alter ego, Sophie, who appears in various poses in the artist's

installation and photographic work. This armless version with a bulbous skirt is head-butting a firehose reel on the basement wall. This sculpture of Sophie captures the general mood in the building concerning its pending sale. Later, she gets covered in bubble wrap that slowly unravels. She turns around over time, exposed. But in all these shifting poses during the August House ructions, Sophie never moves out. Not even when Mary temporarily does.

Sophie has a special connection to the building, in addition to being made here. In the work *Long Live the Dead Queen*, she graced an entire August House facade at the Moseley Street intersection, photographed in a dramatic blue dress that represented both domestic work and Victorian styling. The billboard was installed as part of the 2010 Johannesburg Art City Project, the first in a series initiated by public art advocate Lesley Perkes (who died in 2015). The aim was to temporarily transfigure the city into a gallery. Lesley described her practice, in a 2012 interview we held in August House, as working in ‘impossible spaces’.

Mary is letting Sophie go and moving into new artistic territory. In April 2014, she opens a major installation *The Purple Shall Govern* at the Standard Bank Gallery. The network of roots in the work suggests new growth and rhizomatic interconnections, or ‘the meaning of the self in a state of transition’, according to the exhibition catalogue.⁶²

I saw Sophie during the research period in a variety of places, mostly museum-quality shows: a solo at the Standard Bank gallery, in Finland at a group exhibition on South African art, in London at the British Museum in a group exhibition on South African art, a group exhibition at Iziko South African National Gallery (SANG), and Zeitz MOCAA. She also featured at Gallery MOMO in Cape Town, which represents her. Sibande’s work travelled far and wide, best exemplified by a crate that dominated the basement of August House for some time, scripted for an installation: “Mary Sibande. Wish you were here.”

In March 2016, Steyn first mentioned Sibande in an interview – he had seen her work on The Armory Show, an art fair in New York. Significantly, he said the work was not part of the special ‘Africa’ focus but exhibited on the main fair. This seemed to indicate her international status and perhaps also the growing status of contemporary art from Africa at such global nodal events. In 2017, Scheryn acquired three of her artworks.

⁶² Gurney, K. 2017. *August House is Dead, Long Live August House! The story of a Johannesburg atelier*. Johannesburg: Fourthwall Books: 32.

f) *Speak No Evil* (2016)

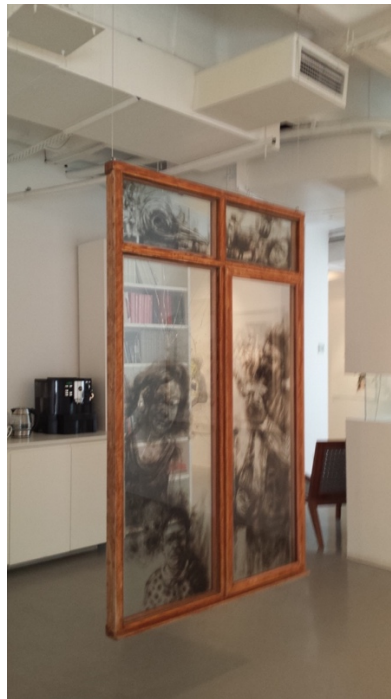


Fig. 61: *People in Glass Houses* (2015). Smoke on glass, found window. Installation view.

Diane Victor

Smoke on glass in found frame

126 x 119 x 6cm

Mixed media work

Location: Private residence

Diane Victor worked in August House during the research period and, unlike the other artists, she never left – even during the uncertain sale period of the building. This was largely because due to a major health challenge at the time. In another August House link, I previously shared a studio with her for about 18 months before moving to my own live-work space one floor below.

The excerpt below, cites Victor's work from an article that reflected upon fire as social protest and artistic medium, written from the perspective of the flame.

I am lit in barbaric attack. Four masked men broke into a radio studio and poured petrol over the Bolivian presenter and then summonsed me. Reportedly, I am politically motivated.

I am lit in social commentary. The artist raises me to the paper and creates ghostly smoke drawings of people including Gaddafi in a work called 'The Butcher's Altar'.

I am lit in remembrance. The man poured flammable liquid over himself at a Tel Aviv protest to mark other protests and brought me along. People tried to put me out with

shirts and water. I am not sure why I am here. The authorities think it has something to do with the high cost of living and other social issues.⁶³

Victor's work usually makes biting sociopolitical commentary. In December 2015, after interviewing Victor at August House about the changes in the atelier, she directed me to Goodman Gallery where a new work of hers was showing. *People in Glass Houses* (Fig. 61) was a smoke artwork on a found window, suspended from the ceiling. Its panes depicted people from disparate socio-economic circumstances in separate yet related realities trying in vain to access each other's worlds. Scheryn later acquired a large smoke-on-glass work called *Speak No Evil*.

A Victor drawing of graphite, charcoal and ash on paper, *Abomakgereza*, almost broke the R200,000 mark at Aspire's Cape Town auction in October 2016, the highest amount in South Africa paid for the artist. Its subject matter depicted a recycler carrying a bag of goods slung over his shoulder, his face masked as he walked down a street. Not enough time has passed for a formal revaluation but theoretically this comparable transaction represented a doubling in the acquisition price of *Speak No Evil*, acquired year-end 2016.

5.4. Context: African contemporary art



Fig. 62: Ed Young's *All So Fucking African* (oil on board), at New York's The Armory Show. *Focus: African Perspectives* (2016). Image: Katherine McMahon, Artnews.

⁶³ Gurney, K. 2013. Ethnography of a Flame. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 27(4). November: 441.

The tagline ‘African contemporary art’ has seen a kind of boosterism over recent years. There is a resurgence of interest internationally, indicated by the rise in art fairs focused on Africa⁶⁴ and increased attention from museums including London’s Tate and Washington DC’s Smithsonian. The number of biennales on the continent has also doubled over the last five years to 15 in 2014, according to *Africa Art Market Report* (Aka, 2015: 4). The art auction market has reflected this surge. International players in the African contemporary genre have risen from one to four at time of writing. In South Africa, Aspire Art Auctions launched during the research period, focused upon 20th century and contemporary art. International auction house Phillips sent Arnold Lehman, former director of Brooklyn Museum, to explore options in South Africa. Pontus Silfverstolpe, co-founder of Barnebys, an art and auction search engine, said in a media statement: “Suddenly we have a new scramble for Africa, and this time it’s about art ... The scramble is to acquire it, as the educated view in the capitals of the world is that South African and African art is a bull market, with one’s investment liable to return a handsome profit in the years ahead” (Barnebys, 2016). Sotheby’s, another international player, conducted its inaugural sale of African modern and contemporary art in London in May 2017, which included over 115 works by 60 artists from 14 countries. Hannah O’Leary, head of department, said she had seen an exponential increase in demand from collectors in Africa and the diaspora as well as international collectors and so-called influencers. “The marketplace for modern and contemporary art from Africa has transformed dramatically over the past decade, but despite this long-overdue correction, there’s still a considerable way to go towards addressing the under-representation of African artists, who account for just 0.01% of the international art market” (Sotheby’s, 2017).

But what does the tagline ‘African contemporary art’ actually mean, and how does the Scheryn Art Collection speak to this term? This section will unpack those questions. I have chosen to position this case study in a global context of exhibitions about African contemporary art, given the collection’s focus upon acquiring works with global appeal, rather than comparing it to other private collections that are quite disparate in their geographies, motivations and holdings. This positioning offers a more generative consideration of the impact such a collection could have; Steyn

⁶⁴ These include an African focus in The Armory Show (2016) and 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London and, more recently, New York.

himself talks about the human impulse for collecting – the desire to show others something interesting, whether it's a child with a new knife or an adult with a new car. That is not to say collections are straightforward or unproblematic entities. On the contrary, as James Clifford points out, with reference to artefacts and cultural practices, relocation into Western exchange systems and disciplinary archives ascribe a given 'value' using ideological and institutional assumptions about temporality, wholeness and continuity that are contested (1988: 215). Clifford also points out that in the West, collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture and authenticity but this is not a universal understanding of the assemblage of a material world, which is more common and generally involves hierarchies of value, exclusions and self-governed territories (1988: 218). "The time and order of the collection erase the concrete social labour of its making" (Clifford, 1988: 220). Partly for this reason, the thesis research starts in the studio to make visible the practice and process of making before moving to the collection and its validation circuitry. This ordering also has significance for the kinds of insights that can be generated, as Chapter 6 will demonstrate in its stitching together of insights between case studies.

In addition, "powerful discriminations made at particular moments constitute the general system of objects within which valued artifacts circulate and make sense" (Clifford, 1988: 221). This system of objects creates a world of value, and a meaningful deployment and circulation of artefacts is maintained (Clifford, 1988: 220). This chapter unpacks this system of (art) objects through a case study that shows how such valuations are made in private acquisitions processes and puts these discriminations into an artworld context. Because objects are classified by an art-culture system and assigned value, and this schematic is actually porous and mutable with categories constantly changing, Clifford also thinks the history of a collection and display should be a self-conscious and visible aspect of any collection, "to jostle and set in motion the ways in which anthropologists, artists, and their publics collect themselves and the world" (1988: 229). This chapter also makes this schematic visible.

The overview, below, briefly reflects upon some key mega-exhibitions that, for better or worse, have helped define so-called 'African contemporary art' as a genre in theory and discourse. This informs the collecting context for Scheryn, which assembles

African contemporary art from the continent and diaspora. The genre is contested in part because it foregrounds identity, and this is often perceived as essentialising artists from the continent. Many of these artists have fluid identities and nomadic lives, as 5.3. demonstrated, whereas being labelled ‘African’ categorises them and their art with preconceived expectations often rooted in stereotype. As Yvette Mutumba, who curated the African focus of The Armory Show in 2016, told an interviewer: “Well, we don’t believe that there is such a thing as ‘contemporary African art’. This work is really part of a global contemporary ... we also emphasise looking back on recent history to resist the idea that this movement is something new” (Rodney, 2015). Steyn pointed out something similar – that artists who were truly global in their production were pegged as international artists whose work could migrate into other contexts. “If you are in the top bracket, you are not [considered] ‘African’ anymore you are just a big artist, at the same level” (personal interview, 2015).

The summaries, below, help to problematise the tagline of African contemporary art as geographies in motion. The selection begins with *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris in 1989, a major curatorial instance of foreigners defining African contemporary art. It ends with *Black Portraits* in Johannesburg in 2016, which offered a local counterpoint and returns the subject matter to home soil. Importantly, the subject matter in associated literatures is strongly biased towards the global North. That geography is also somewhat ironically where perceived notions around ‘African contemporary art’ have largely been forged. This thesis writes against such information flow with original case study data and perspectives from a global South project.

a) *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, and set out in 1989 to counteract ethnocentric practices – for instance by doing away with geographic groupings and stoking debate around the curator as author. As Martin put it, 100% of exhibitions were at that point ignoring 80% of the earth; the exhibition was “a metaphoric call for a new geography of art history” (Friedel, 2016). In particular, *Magiciens* reacted against ‘primitivism’, the idea that African artists created in the more traditional way of craft and for utilitarian ends. *Magiciens* had such a significant impact that the Pompidou Centre in 2015 revisited the original exhibition to reflect upon its legacy.

Magiciens had a fraught curatorial premise and disturbing understanding around so-called global art, according to Koyo Kouoh, a curator from Senegal. But it was also undeniably a co-ordinate in the genealogy of contemporary art: “It exposed a critical void that existed in contemporary art by Africans themselves and the institutional void and public void, and [was] a slap in the face of young curators,” (Kouoh, 2015). This led to a range of corrective curatorial practice during the early 1990s onwards.

b) Dak’Art, the Dakar Biennale in Senegal, was initiated the very same year as *Magiciens* (1989) to alternate between visual art and literature but rebranded itself in 1996 to focus purely on contemporary art. Its May 2016 edition, *The City in the Blue Daylight*, was curated by Simon Njami. That theme linked to a poem title, calling upon artists to re-enchant the present with new strategies and aesthetics. According to the curatorial statement: “If Africa remains our priority, we must, nevertheless, create some new tools of reflection and implementation of new ways and new ideas regarding theories, practices and production” (Njami, 2016). Njami was also the cofounder of the respected journal, *Revue Noire*, which helped intervene in the discourse around contemporary African art.

c) A series of exhibitions followed in Euro-America. These included: *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art* (Susan Vogel); *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994* (Okwui Enwezor); *Snap Judgements: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (Okwui Enwezor); *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* (Laurie Ann Farrell); *Authentic/ Ex-centric: Africa in and out of Africa* (Salah Hassan, Olu Oguibe & Emma Bedford). Very few of these mega-exhibitions, however, also came to the African continent. *Africa Remix* was a notable exception: it first showed at the South Bank in London before making a European run and finally visiting Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) in 2007. This show of 83 artists from 25 African countries and the diaspora was regarded as the first major exhibition of contemporary African art held in Africa itself. The JAG director at the time, Clive Kellner, said exhibitions such as *Africa Remix* were usually only seen in Europe or the US; the intention was to bring the exhibition, which was about Africa, to Africa for a local audience to engage (Gurney, 2007). Kellner also cautioned against the essentialist stereotypes about what comprised ‘African’ artistic production: “Somehow there still remains a notion that contemporary African artists should not make work that comprises new media – that

authentic African artists only produce things with their hands, like paintings and sculpture ... This is really a shocking comment in the 21st century.”

Despite this breakthrough, most such blockbusters performed a sense of ‘being African’ in other places for other faces, said Kouoh, but things were starting to change. “There is a strange energy in the African contemporary sector that is unprecedented. This is the energy that is contagious and being felt and transmitted. Different canons are being established. Different economies even ... This is where the big shift is happening – a wealth of practitioners highly educated, assertive and astute. This is a strong trend on our continent” (Kouoh, 2015).

d) *Black Portraitures III – Reinventions: Strains of Histories and Cultures* was held in Johannesburg in November 2016. It was hosted by New York University with local partners, the seventh in a series of conversations about imaging the black body. Its self-described topics ranged from biennales, the Africa perspective in The Armory Show, the global art market, politics, tourism, sites of memory, Afrofuturism, fashion, dance, music, film, art, and photography. “This was the beginning of a more inclusive and representative academic conversation and exchange of knowledge and experiences and hopefully a carving of more spaces and academic conversations of the black experience, in all its nuanced and complex forms,” an online review declared (Mathabathe, 2017).

In sum, it is evident from this mega-exhibition overview that the tagline ‘African contemporary art’ has a contested legacy and its meaning is still under debate. “It’s not a comfortable way of framing everyone who has been born here or lived here or made work here,” agrees Emma Bedford, a director and senior art specialist at Aspire Art Auctions (personal interview, 2017). That said, some artists found it worked to their advantage and they ran with it. Bedford also pointed out how different work sold in different geographies. Speaking about a locally valued South African painter of the 20th century, she said: “Clearly, there is no global market for [JH] Pierneef. Are we surprised? Not really. It’s a very particular South African aesthetic and rooted in very particular South African values. But others do astonishingly well [internationally]. There are different markets, tastes and ideas about what African art is and where it belongs. But all of that forms part of what we do.”

The case study of Scheryn, the assemblage of a new collection of African contemporary art, clearly relates to a longer line of expositions that engage the very notion of the genre. Its distinguishing features, which Part II will now articulate, have implications taken forward in the research findings.

For my own part, the designation ‘African contemporary art’ in the thesis title takes its cue in turn from the constituent case studies in order to signal the geographies it engages and their particularities. That said, the work simultaneously makes a strong claim as part of a global dialogue. Its findings articulate this larger nomadic sense of contemporary art as a vector of value, which instantiates a worldview as it moves. Although it runs some risks, I have used the ‘African’ tagline to push back in a worldly dialogue from a situated global South positionality.

Part II

The second half of Chapter 5, Part II, focuses upon the underlying technical structure of the collection – namely, the Scheryn Art Collection Trust, positioned in the broader context of the art market. It first sketches an overview of that market, including a section on art funds in a nod to the collection's roots, and then clarifies how the underlying trust operates and differentiates itself. After dealing with the key process of valuation, it concludes the chapter on Scheryn by elaborating upon the key finding for this case study: structural thinking.

5.5. Context: The art market

William Baumol, writing three decades ago, held that there was zero return to be had on art investments. An economist, who studied centuries of price data, Baumol claimed in a paper *Unnatural Value: or Art Investment as Floating Crap Game* that the real rate of return on art investments was basically zero. Prices were random because tastes changed, so better price analysis and information would also not help art investment performance, Baumol said (1986: 10). Since then, an art investment sector under the umbrella of so-called alternative assets has sprung up ostensibly disproving this theory. Alternative assets generally include private equity, real estate, commodity futures, hedge funds and funds of hedge funds. They can also include so-called passion investments – collectibles like wine, stamps, coins or fine art. The latter are sometimes called emotional assets; they potentially offer an aesthetic as well as a financial dividend. As discussed earlier, alternative assets are regarded as having a low correlation to mainstream holdings like equities (shares) and bonds. The global financial firm, PricewaterhouseCoopers, expects growth of alternative investments to 2020 – especially in South America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East – based on three factors: a government-incentivised shift to individual retirement plans, growth of high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) from emerging populations, and growth of sovereign investors ('Alternative Asset Management ...', 2015: 10). Within related literature, the general consensus is that art offers a lower return on investment than equity markets but compensates with an aesthetic yield. Opinion appeared more divided about whether art offered effective portfolio diversification. Some were in favour (Mei & Moses, 2002) while others held an opposing view (Botha, Scott & Snowball, 2015). High transaction costs and other expenses such as storage, transport and insurance, compromised art investment returns.

There has always been a huge demand for alternative assets, such as gold and diamonds, Steyn pointed out (personal interview, 2015). He surmised motivation for ultra-high-net-worth collectors this way: “Once you have a certain number, you have your properties and your financial assets – you are secure with enough money. You buy gold, and then what do you do? So you buy expensive art. I don’t think the guy who pays \$170 million for an artwork really thinks it is worth \$170 million. He doesn’t know what it is worth, actually. He just thinks there is somebody else who is going to buy it for more”. People also liked to own things and have something to show others, he added. That kind of desire manifested itself in the personalisation of artworks – “I have a Pierneef” – where the artwork itself became secondary to the artist brand. Steyn offered an anecdote about a collection acquired by an hotelier in lieu of payments. “People love that story ... an artist, he paid you in art, and now it’s worth *this*. Everybody wants to have that story. Everybody wants to discover a treasure”.

Indeed, financial return is only one kind of return when it comes to assets. There is also utility or consumption return, and return from buying undervalued assets (Coffman, 1991). In addition, art owners take pleasure in intrinsic value – aesthetic pleasure, or the work as a storehouse of an artist’s deftness as well as signaling wealth, writes Mandel. “It is the mixture of pecuniary and nonpecuniary payoffs to ownership that makes artworks compelling to purchase and difficult to value” (Mandel, 2009: 1653). Thorstein Veblen, in 1899, coined the term “conspicuous consumption” to indicate goods unrelated to intrinsic value – often their appeal conversely increased as the price rose. Such goods are sometimes called Veblen goods. An intriguing South African youth subculture keys into this appraisal: *izikothane* (‘to lick’), or burning specific high-end brands and cash in public displays. At a 2011 presentation on Johannesburg’s imagined future to 2018, academic Sarah Nuttall spoke about *izikothane* as ‘conspicuous destruction’, citing Megan Jones.⁶⁵ This phenomenon could also be conceived as a form of potlatch, as Baudrillard evoked in Chapter 3.

Piet Viljoen is firmly on Baumol’s side of the fence; he does not think art makes a good investment at all. “It’s illiquid, the pricing is opaque, there is massive insider

⁶⁵Center for Historical Reenactments, August House, Johannesburg. Author’s notes.

dealing, there's a huge bid-offer spread. I don't think it's a fantastic store of monetary value on average" (personal interview, 2016). It was a store of societal value, Viljoen said, and drew a distinction between private investments and art, as the latter was supposed to be a public good. Even a director of Bonhams, an international auction house, preferred to talk about art buying than art investment, largely because motivations for acquiring art were multiple. Giles Peppiatt recounted speaking to a collector who had paid over £7 million for an artwork primarily to acquire something unique. "It's not about money but about acquiring the picture," Peppiatt claimed (personal interview, 2015).

That all said, there is another macro-economic dimension regarding the art market that is absolutely pertinent to consider: the major central bank strategies of quantitative easing which followed the 2007-08 financial crisis. This complex injection of new money into the broader financial system for almost a decade had the nett effect of subduing interest rates and therefore heightening the appeal of alternative assets like contemporary art (as well as museums and private art foundations), as writer JJ Charleworth has pointed out in *Art Review* (2017).⁶⁶ This more cynical boost to the global contemporary art market should also be borne in mind.

Since the mid-1980s, when Baumol dismissed art as investment, much has arguably changed – notably increased financialisation of the artworld. Édouard Glissant, invoked in Chapter 4 to understand artistic strategies of detour, told an interviewer that high prices in art were a kind of violence of conventional existence in society, and that the innovation an artist was seeking should have nothing to do with that. "It seems that nowadays violence is assimilated by the majority of humanities into a form of satisfaction within the domain of art. We need to think about that" (Diawara, 2011: 18). Perhaps the clearest manifestation of that notion of invisible violence became evident during the research period in the number of freeports opening up around the world. These are essentially tax-free holding spaces for highly valuable art and other collectibles. Switzerland, Monaco, Luxembourg and Singapore all offer these specially designed warehouses with temperature control and security measures.⁶⁷ The artworks they hold are stored out of public sight and circulation while they await

⁶⁶ See Thompson (2017) for more on this topic.

⁶⁷ For example, visit <http://www.lefreeport.lu/>

future sale, arguably doing both the art and the public a violence. The artworks are also held in tax limbo, as technically they are goods in transit. Glissant's critique is reflected in artworks by the artistic duo Rosenclaire (Rose Shakinovsky and Claire Gavronsky), as below.



Fig. 63: Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, depicting an artwork by Rosenclaire.

Art, financial assets and the broader market are nonetheless imbricated and their relationship is mostly measured with price indices. The Mei Moses index is one of the most well known. South Africa had its own version – the Citadel Art Price Index (Capi), which was set up in 2011 by Citadel, a wealth management firm, and Econex, an economics consultancy. Capi, now defunct, tracked sales by the prominent auction houses (the hammer price) of the top 100 artists ranked by volume of works sold. The idea was to offer a purview of the sector, and an index is a statistical measure of the changes in a portfolio of stocks representing a portion of the overall market.

The most transparent way to take a measure of the art market is through auction results, the closest equivalent to an open market. This is not where Scheryn sourced its acquisitions – it favoured the primary market of galleries and art fairs, not the

secondary market of auctions. That distinction is detailed by Fedderke & Li: “At the primary level, unorganized individual artists supply works to galleries, local art fairs, collective exhibitions, small dealers, and private buyers. At the secondary level, art markets locate mostly in major cities, such as Cape Town and Johannesburg, where art is frequently traded. In those cities, established artists, dealers, and public or private collectors circulate works by artists who have managed to make the transition from the primary market” (Fedderke & Li, 2014: 4). The highest level in this hierarchical art market structure was the international market, Fedderke & Li added – represented by major auction houses like Sotheby’s and Christie’s. Nonetheless, a brief look at auctions helps set a broader context. “I don’t dream up valuations,” said Aspire’s Bedford. She said the auction house subscribed to various indices and factors like subject matter, size, scale, impact, period, provenance, artwork condition, and how these factors worked as a totality in order to arrive at value. The valuation process was also strongly informed by intangibles like experience, knowledge, relationships and training.

Because the secondary market is quantifiable and can reveal risk information, art is even considered by some analysts as loan collateral (McAndrew & Thompson, 2007). Auctions are also useful as comparable price indicators for artworks acquired through other channels; this was their chief function for Scheryn, to help ascertain fair value. Globally, there is a move away from auction houses to private sales, according to The European Fine Art Foundation (TEFAF). It found a larger proportion of dealers (62.5%) to auction acquisition channels (37.5%) in its annual art market report (Pownall, 2017: 13). The same report estimated the global art market at \$45 billion during 2016 (2017: 12). Since 2000, Citigroup found the global art auction market had grown at an annual compound rate of 13% to reach \$16.1 billion (Gyorgy et al., 2015). Over a longer trajectory, art had underperformed equities but outperformed bonds over the past 100 years of data, the same *Global Art Market* report found. Over time, the report found there was a clear link between art prices and the global economy; some of the strongest falls, for instance, followed World War I, the early 1930s, the early 1990s, and after the 2008 financial crisis. Likewise, the early 2000s was an exceptional period with China joining the World Trade Organization in 2001 and reshaping international commerce. Overall, the Citigroup report found a place for art within illiquid asset holdings in portfolios that would otherwise hold art – but it was about finding relative value rather than market exposure (Gyorgy et al., 2015: 3).

Benjamin Mandel, one of the authors of the Citigroup report, stated that two structural changes were driving the global art market. The first was the rise of China, profoundly impacting the geography of the art market with a high concentration of high-net-worth individuals. The second was the outperformance of top prices (Gyorgy et al., 2015: 8). The report found widening global wealth inequality was possibly driving the steady stream of record auction results in the US and UK. An increasing share of sales was tagged with high prices; in data-speak, “the tail of the price distribution has become fatter” (Gyorgy et al., 2015: 9). This meant the higher percentiles were showing disproportionate growth. Figures released for TEFAF’s 2016 art market report bear this out: growth in the \$1 million-plus segment far outpaced all others. In the decade to 2015, that segment grew in value by 400% at four times or more the rate of low and medium segments. Works at the ultra-high end priced over \$10 million outperformed, with over 1,000% growth in the same period, TEFAF said in a statement (‘The European Fine ...’, 2016).

Citigroup’s “fat tail” was described as reflecting a wealth gap. Art auction sales could even be construed as a metric for inequality, according to Andrea Fraser. She put forward the idea that art collecting profits were based on the growth of income inequality all over the world. “This redistribution of capital in turn has a direct influence on the art market: the greater the discrepancy between the rich and the poor, the higher prices in this market rise. The situation, it would seem, urgently calls for the development of alternatives to the existing system” (Fraser, 2011). Fraser drew in turn upon research that found equity markets and art prices over the past two centuries were linked; and evidence that an increase in income inequality may lead to higher prices for art. According to that research, “... it is indeed the money of the wealthy that drives art prices. This implies that we can expect art booms whenever income inequality rises quickly” (Goetzmann, Renneboog & Spaenjers, 2010: 20). The authors claim this is the first study to investigate the interaction between income, inequality and art prices; there exists relatively little work on the link between the art market and the broader economy (2010: 5). In addition to a link between art prices and inequality (Fraser, 2011; Goetzmann, Renneboog & Spaenjers, 2010), associated literature also found a positive correlation between art prices and real estate (Candela & Scorcu, 1997: 188).

There was some uncertainty about where this fat tail would lead, “how fast the market will end up growing, and what the geography of sales will ultimately look like in 2030, remain wide open empirical questions” (Gyorgy et al., 2015: 23). The same Citigroup report predicted the trajectory of top art prices as a reflection of widening inequality must also eventually settle – but that pathway was unclear (2015: 23). What is also a wide open empirical question is how such factors play out in an entirely different geography and socio-economic context, like South Africa. This is an example of where the literature, skewed towards the North, is perhaps inadequate to describe local realities. It was also not possible, from the Scheryn data, to make a comparison about the “fat tail” since not enough time had passed for a reasonable revaluation of most of the portfolio’s artworks. The majority of Scheryn artworks to year-end 2016 were acquired in the R100,000 – R200,000 price bracket, followed some frequency behind by the R300,000 – R400,000 and R200,000 – R300,000 brackets respectively.⁶⁸

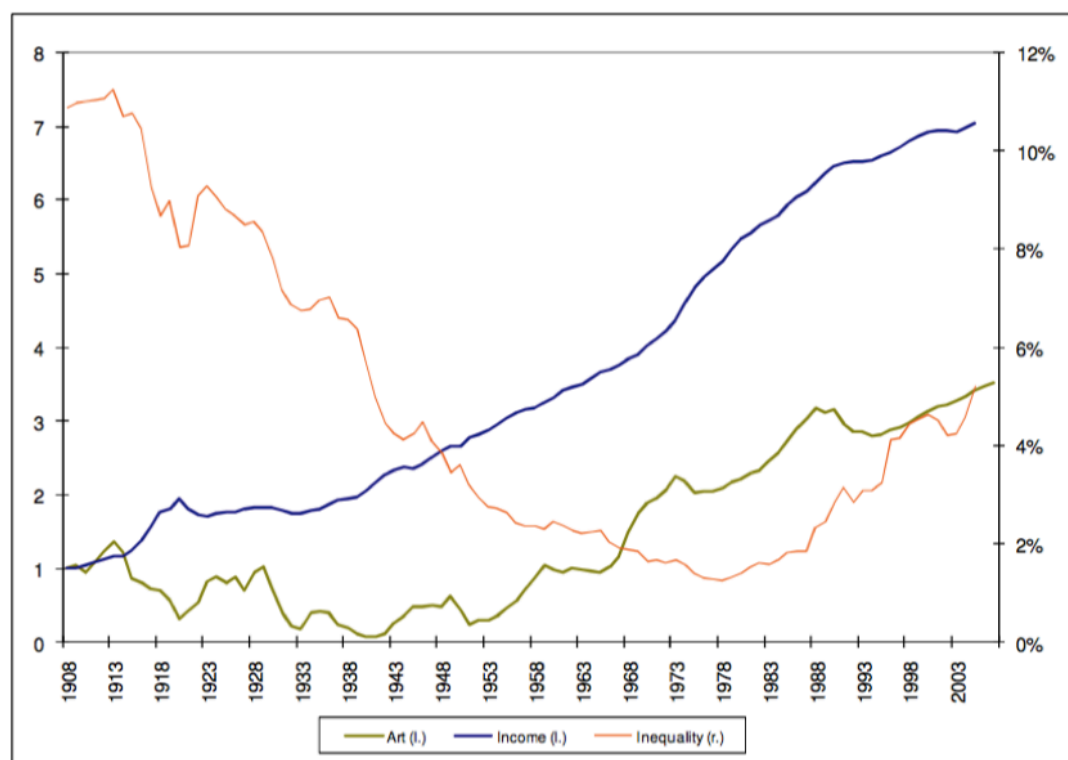


Fig. 64: Art, income and inequality (Goetzmann, Renneboog & Spaenjers, 2010: 4). The values of art and income in 1908 are put equal to 1, plotted against the left-hand axis. The value of inequality is equal to the percentage share of the top 0.1% income earners in total income, right-hand axis.

⁶⁸ This shifted for the year ending December 2017, with the median artwork price at R322,977 which would be more supportive of a fat tail theory. There were outliers: the most expensive artwork acquired during 2017 was R2.4 million and the cheapest was R13,680.

However, the broader point about inequality needs some unpacking with reference to the South African art market. It is often stated that South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world with its income and wealth disparities. Chapter 4 has already set out in some detail the findings of a series of city reports which bring this analysis to the fore and highlight in particular the challenge of spatial inequality. The topic is much more complex than the Gini co-efficient, a measure of income inequality, would imply; and the basis of such calculations is also disputed by fact-checkers (Kotzé, 2016). That said, inequalities can be quite transparent. In November 2016, I attended a Strauss auction in Cape Town at a high-end hotel where over R58 million worth of sales were made. This included artworks by some of the Scheryn artists I was following at the time. Multi-million rand sums were fetched from a room of elite buyers – in particular for South African Modernists – artworks that in some cases ironically depicted scenes of servitude, such as working in a field or queuing up for pension payouts. This put me in mind of the Wa Lehlere artwork in the Scheryn collection, superimposing queues onto the old South African banknote. Most strikingly present in my mind was the coinciding student revolt the very same day on the issue of #FeesMustFall, about access to tertiary education but arguably protesting deeper structural inequities in South African society that persist. It seemed, in this moment, that art auctions and their prices did offer a staging for income and wealth disparities.

What does the issue of inequality mean for a collection of African contemporary art? On the one hand, art is a high-end purchase so collectors must have disposable income and such collections can partially index rising wealth. Africa is fast urbanising (see 4.4.) and this brings a growing middle class. International and domestic sales of African modern and contemporary art was on the increase, according to Deloitte, fuelled in particular by rapid growth in ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWI) (\$30 million-plus) in Nigeria. “This has created a new generation of African collectors with an interest in art as an asset class, and opens up the possibilities for a future art and finance industry as the art market matures in the region” (‘Art and Finance ...’, 2014: 50). The Nigerian market was set to take on the more established South African market in the next 12 months, the report added. The Nigerian auction house, Art House Contemporary, registered a 25% increase in sales between 2008 and 2012.

Despite ongoing difficult economic conditions in many emerging markets, the appetite of wealth collectors had not diminished, according to Knight Frank's 2016 Wealth Report. If anything, it found during periods of economic uncertainty, many wealthy individuals in emerging markets looked for tangible investments that would appreciate in value. "As individuals in emerging markets become wealthier, we expect to see the numbers of collectors increase. Not only do collectables represent a safe asset investment, they are a way of illustrating status and a sense of having 'arrived'" (Knight Frank Research, 2016: 33-34). Furthermore, the world's top 200 art collectors came from 36 countries in 2015, up from 17 in the year 1990, and many of these were from emerging markets like China and Brazil. The largest number of private art collections, however, was in Europe followed by North America and Asia because "the higher a country's per capita income, the larger is the number of private art collections per capita" (Steiner, Frey & Resch, 2014: 9).

Country-level wealth distribution was also set out by Knight Frank Research (2016). In South Africa, there were 46,500 millionaires in 2015, with \$1 million-plus, up from 25,500 in 2005. Multi-millionaires in South Africa with over \$10 million numbered 2060 in 2015 – up from 1,130 a decade earlier. UHNWI with over \$30 million numbered 639 in 2015, almost doubling over a decade. The rare category of centi-millionaires, with over \$100 million, numbered 87 in 2015, up from 48 in 2005. There were six billionaires in South Africa in 2015, doubling from 2005. Overall, the UHNW index showed an 82% change over the decade it measured. "It's a rising group of people that will buy," Steyn agreed.

Steyn's view on the topic was that the rich were getting richer at a faster rate than the poor were getting richer – but the poor were much better off than they were 10 years ago. The rich were getting richer because once a certain level of wealth was acquired, it was easier to generate more, he explained. "You have the money to invest, and opportunities come to you and then you start screening. Technologies have also made things local." He acknowledged there was greed in the world but held that the system was working so long as the poor were becoming better off above inflation. While the middle class was getting wealthier, there were blocks of people struggling particularly in a low interest rate environment, and unemployment levels were a major issue. But the world was getting wealthier, he said, and there were also more people chasing

fewer worthwhile acquisitions. Viljoen was also not convinced about the prevailing inequality narrative. He did not think the world was more unequal now than it had been in the past: “In fact, I think there is a broader middle class now than there ever has been before. So I think the world has become more equal not less equal. However, what has happened is – at the very top there are ridiculously rich people, which may be different to what was there before ... but possibly that will sort itself out over time.” Viljoen is of the view that extreme wealth leads to hubris, which in turn leads to other things that help destroy this polarity over time. And art would find its own way in that mix. In addition, he pointed out that art has always had a symbiosis with wealth.

As Chapter 4 raised, what is perhaps less appreciated in inequality analysis is its spatial manifestations in South Africa (Bernstein, Altbeker & Johnston, 2016; Götz & Mushongera, 2016; ‘Integrated Urban Development...’, 2016; Karuri-Sebina, 2016; Moreno et al., 2016). Philip Harrison was part of an expert reference group for the development of South Africa’s National Development Plan, a blueprint set of aims to 2030. Speaking about this process, at a public panel in 2015, Harrison said spatial dysfunctionality was an important contributor to inequality.⁶⁹ His point was underscored on the same panel by another academic, Alan Mabin, who said the grand plan of apartheid was about power but the subtext was space. The post-apartheid effects of this spatial inequality have been exacerbated by urban sprawl as a result of urbanisation. In effect, this reluctance to densify meant the more privileged kept the benefit of economic centralities and the less privileged were held to economic peripheries.

This phenomenon is where Goniwe’s earlier comment is particularly compelling. He said that artworks were about ideas more than anything else, and they asked us to get out of our selves. “An artwork is to begin a journey that is unpredictable and *to imply other spaces, multiple trajectories for people to travel*” (Goniwe, 2016, added emphasis). That powerful thought is made more so in the evident local context of spatial inequality. Artworks offer ways to travel without physically moving, to enter implied spaces; in a country with profound spatial inequality, this holds a radical potential. This conceptual mobility is a journey of the mind. Its implications also

⁶⁹ *Faces of the City*. 2015. University of the Witwatersrand. Author’s notes.

place an added imperative upon custodians of art to bring such work into public space, including economic peripheries, where it can be more accessible.

Art funds

When this research began, the Scheryn collection existed primarily as a legal entity in the form of an art fund and, as mentioned, was reportedly the first of its kind on the African continent, private syndicates excepted. This was partly due to tax and exchange control considerations, as well as the profit motive, Steyn said. Most art funds were set up in tax havens but Scheryn's was domiciled in South Africa. The reasons were multiple, according to Steyn. These included keeping the artwork it held onshore so it could be experienced and shown locally. "African art should have a house in Africa", he added. It was also less expensive to manage this way and more inclusive because, in an exchange control environment, offshore structures could be prohibitive. More philosophically, its onshore strategy validated on home soil the work of artists from the continent. The collection could be regarded as part of a broader critical reclamation for African artists to benchmark themselves on their continent's terms rather than looking to an elsewhere. Over the research period, the entity was reconfigured as the Scheryn Art Collection rather than its original designation, the Scheryn Art Fund. This shift better signalled the ethos and curatorial intentions of its members. Nonetheless, a technical structure underlying the collection, a legal and financial mechanism in the form of a private trust, remained. The diagram below, figure 65, shows this reconfigured dual governance structure comprising a private management company on the one hand and the private trust on the other. Given the collection's genealogy, this section will briefly consider the nature of conventional art funds before describing the specificities and distinguishing features of the Scheryn Art Collection Trust. Art investment funds are a specialist aspect of the art market and knowledge about how they work offers further insights into structural thinking. These in turn inform propositions put forward in Chapter 6, which collates observations and their implications.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ I formerly worked as a journalist at London's *Financial Times Business*, including News Editor of a weekly focused upon investment funds (2000-01), an experience which also informs my general understanding of collective investment vehicles.

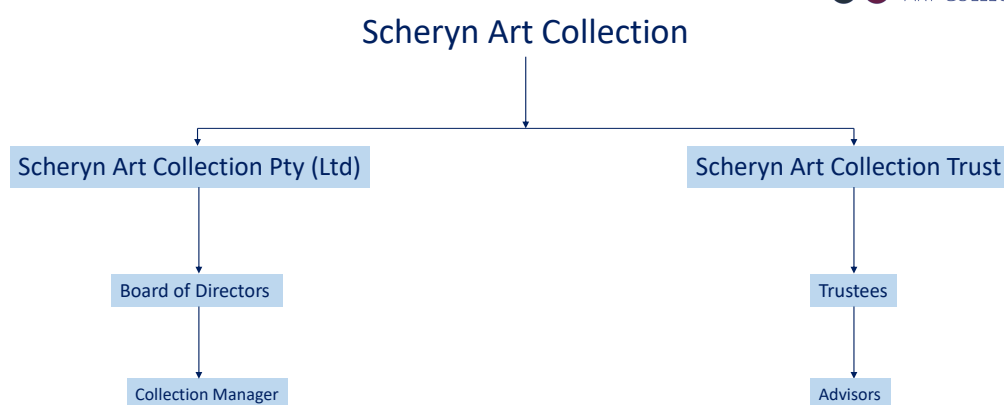


Fig. 65: Governance structure. Source: Scheryn.

An art fund, generally speaking, is a privately offered investment fund dedicated to the generation of returns through acquisition and disposition of works of art, according to the Art Fund Association.⁷¹ The association says such funds are managed by a professional art investment management or advisory firm, which receives a management fee (usually between 1% and 3%) and a portion of any returns delivered by the fund. There are not many such funds in existence. In 2014, there were 72 art funds and trusts operating internationally with 55 of these domiciled in China (*'Art & Finance ...'*, 2014). This number is constantly in flux because art funds come and go owing to mixed fortunes. The *Art & Finance Report 2014* conservatively estimated the global investment fund market to be worth \$1.26 billion in the first half of 2014. That figure was significantly lower than \$2.13 billion in 2012, due to unwinding of art investment funds and trusts in China (*'Art & Finance ...'*, 2014: 17). In 2015, the following year, the overall art fund market was estimated slightly lower at \$1.2bn (*'Art & Finance ...'*, 2016: 111). The French Financial Markets Authority has started to regulate art funds, and the Chinese authorities have clamped down upon the same.

Confidence in the future of the art fund industry was mixed, according to Deloitte and ArtTactic. The majority of respondents in its *Art & Finance Report 2014* thought it would expand but issues such as due diligence, lack of liquidity, valuation, lack of track records, and an unregulated market remained. These issues generated arbitrage

⁷¹ www.artfundassociation.com

opportunities or they increased risk, depending on investment view. Either way, art funds could become one-stop service platforms for the wealth management industry, diversification tools for portfolios, and ‘door openers’ for new collectors, the same report suggested. But the wealth management industry needed to rethink its model, including why people bought art in the first place: “With 78 per cent of art collectors citing emotional factors as key to buying art, and 61 per cent saying that the social value aspect is very important – future art fund models should more effectively incorporate these non-financial elements into their strategy” (‘Art & Finance ...’, 2014: 17). Notable in the attitudes survey were the reasons UHNWIs collected luxury investments. The global average favoured status symbols (50%), followed by passion (43%) and diversification (42%) imperatives, with returns and tax breaks falling farther behind. For African collectors, the top three reasons were status (71%), passion (65%) and diversification (59%).

	Africa	Asia	Australasia	Europe	Latin America	Middle East	North America	Russia & CIS	Global average
Act as status symbols	71	55	37	34	75	35	42	50	50
Passion for the investment	65	34	68	54	13	32	37	40	43
Further diversification	59	38	32	38	25	56	58	30	42
Tangible	24	16	26	29	13	21	26	20	22
Better returns	0	15	11	29	25	15	11	10	15
Tax breaks	0	8	0	14	13	12	16	20	10
Precious metals	18	17	21	10	0	18	16	10	14

Table 4: Reasons UHNWIs collect luxury investments (‘Art & Finance ...’, 2014: 17).

Art funds have a history of mixed fortunes. The British Rail Pension Fund in the UK led the way as a success story. In 1974, it invested a portion of its capital in over 2,500 artworks over a six-year period, and achieved aggregate returns of 11.3% per year compounded from 1974 to 1999, according to the Art Fund Association. Since then numerous proposals and actual funds have tried to follow with different structures and mixed results. First, there was a wave of funds structured like mutual funds (unit trusts), which largely failed; then a new wave in the 1990s benefited from diversification strategies until it became apparent art funds were more correlated to alternative assets than previously thought; more recently, funds were commonly structured as private equity (Schwartz, 2015). “A lot of people have tried and failed,” observed Steyn, shortly after founding Scheryn. “Some funds are pure traders – they

buy and switch and turn – they are really just like dealers.” Steyn said not all funds were the same and there were too few to make a true market, while some only had two or three investors. Early in the setup phase, he remarked: “Hopefully this one will be different ... We are hoping that it will become a medium for people to collect art.”

Well-known art funds globally include: *The Fine Art Fund* (b.2004), based in London and managed by ex-Christie’s executive Philip Hoffman; the *Art Trading Fund*, which was a hedge fund that liquidated; *Collectors Fund* in Kansas City (b.2007), which includes art rotation to create a private museum; and *Artemundi Global Fund* (b.2008) which was liquidated in 2015. Some funds have specialised in particular sectors or regions – the *Tiroche Deleon Collection* based in Gibraltar invests in art from developing markets, for instance. Intentions and investment strategies consequently differ, from geographic arbitrage to showcasing. But the commonality is that all of them are effectively a way to pool capital to purchase works. This offers investors partial or fractal ownership instead of outright acquisition and, like any investment, has pros and cons. This fractal ownership is a key characteristic of structural thinking.

Some key terminology is helpful to elucidate this point. A fund is a legal entity that allows investors to put money in one pot, often tax exempt so investments can grow. In principle, a fund is only a pooling vehicle (Lussan, 2012: 20). There are different kinds of international legal structures for funds, ranging from unit trusts (open-ended collective investment vehicles) to private companies including partnerships. The net asset value (NAV) is the total market value of a fund’s investments, cash or equivalent, receivables and accrued income. Liabilities – including salaries, expenses and operational costs – are generally deducted. Dividing this amount by the number of shares or units issued arrives at NAV. This is one kind of valuation, to determine the current worth of an asset or company but there are different techniques. Valuation is also a way of monetising a non-market benefit (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 136), sometimes called a social utility. Utility (dividend), in the context used by economists, is not a property of a good or service but the derivation of satisfaction from the use of such (Pass, Lowes & Davies, 1988: 534). Utility is unique to each individual. Debate is more around its measurement than the concept. The idea that value lies in the good or service itself is usually rejected in favour of a generalised utility function (Pass, Lowes & Davies, 1988: 536) whereby utility derived is

dependent upon the amounts and relationship to other commodities. This in turn leads to the law of diminishing marginal utility (less satisfaction per added unit), which affects risk-taking and decision-making. That relates in turn to hedonic regression in valuation strategy, which will be picked up in 5.7. below. First, we turn to the specificities of Scheryn's private trust.

5.6. Case: Scheryn Art Collection Trust



Fig. 66: Zeitz MOCAA temporary pavilion, named after Scheryn (left); Fig. 67: The Centre for Performative Practice at Zeitz MOCAA, named after Scheryn.

As discussed, the origins of Scheryn Art Collection Trust were in the shape of an art fund but even at that point in its genesis there were a number of distinguishing features that set it apart from mainstream funds. It was domiciled locally, which meant there would be potential tax implications, such as capital gains, but Steyn did not see that as a stumbling block. “It’s not a trading [entity] so the tax is not such a big issue. And if you pay tax, it means you have made a profit. It’s a good thing. We are not trying to get away from that.” Tax was also a lower price to pay than not being able to be part of the collection, and offshoring would restrict access. “People who want to be in this fund don’t just want to put their art in a storeroom and never see it. We want people to be involved in the art.” He emphasised the idea was to build a collection to hold onto and not build to sell. There would be some careful rotation, for instance if an investor needed to exit, but if you held art for longer you got more value out of it. Steyn said art was a tradeable commodity but this was not what Scheryn was about: “It’s about doing exhibitions, moving around, showing stuff, sharing it with people, people being involved, [it’s] for a community of art collectors rather than trying to be clever and tax-wise.”

The other barrier to entry for comparable initiatives on the continent was sufficient seed capital. Having two private investors instead of a company putting this initial capital forward meant decisions did not have to get compromised to a profit motive, Steyn said. “When you go into art, it’s very difficult to justify the investment. And there are a lot of expenses,” said Steyn. When you start up with other people’s money and need to guarantee it will not fail, many things become difficult. Scheryn’s starter capital from its two co-founders of R20 million in total was used to acquire the first works in the collection; a portion of that seed funding went to the management company for operational expenses. “I think we have enough seed capital to last us for buying until the end of next year [2017], without being too aggressive about it,” Steyn predicted in 2016.

Scheryn sought to deliver aesthetic reward, long-term capital appreciation and to nurture artistic talent. The ideal participant in the scheme was a medium-size private or institutional collector with the resources to invest. This scale of collector could benefit the most from Scheryn’s back-end management and administration. The idea was also to fashion Scheryn as a platform for collectors to engage the artworld. There was no official performance benchmark in terms of “return”; Scheryn would measure itself against its peers including private collectors and comparable institutions. In terms of a tangible return for investors, the broad principle was for the trust’s performance to beat inflation by some margin. Investors who were only after financial reward could go and find something more liquid, Steyn advised. “You are not going to realistically realise this in the short term. We have seen what art does over time, if you buy the right artists, it does appreciate substantially and hopefully we will collect that.”

Scheryn is a stand-alone entity independent from its co-founders’ respective businesses but can nonetheless be read as the latest in a series of structural innovations from Steyn. He previously launched South Africa’s first tracker fund, the Composite Unit Trust, in 1993. A tracker fund is a passive collective investment vehicle – it comprises a basket of equities that generally mimics the performance of a benchmark index by investing proportionally in its constituent holdings. Steyn also co-founded the Nedgroup Investments Positive Return Fund. And he set up Investec’s international fund operations based in Dublin. His current job is executive director of

Prescient, an investment management business. Among other things, Prescient was the first institution in Africa to be granted a Qualified Foreign Institutional Investor licence by the Chinese authorities.⁷² Steyn said: “China is going to one day be the largest economy in the world. You get the volatility ... You have to know what you are doing there. But Chinese are still becoming extremely rich, and [they are] scrapping the rules soon for Chinese investing offshore.” Interestingly enough, during the research period, Prescient unbundled and delisted its financial services arm.

Steyn, the key interlocutor for this case study, is a busy person; he travels a lot, and his phone is constantly buzzing and beeping when we meet for interviews. He will flip into its archive to pull up an image to show an artwork that has recently caught his eye. Just returned from a trip that included Guggenheim Bilbao, we heard earlier how the experience of a Richard Serra sculptural installation changed how he thought about space. During another interview, he mentioned he was up the next morning at half-past five for a meeting because it was the only time all parties could make it. He converses easily on a broad reach of topics. His Scheryn co-founder, Dabing Chen, is an entrepreneur who is active internationally and founder of the Chenshia Group, a trade and investment holding company that includes the Chenshia Art Foundation. Chenshia runs private cultural exchange programmes in collaboration with its own museum in China, including funded exchanges for artists for up to three months at a time. Chen used to work for Chinese state-owned enterprises prior to his entry into private businesses in China. He now serves as a member of the Youth League of China Overseas Chinese Association, among other foundations and associations, a global range reflected in his diplomatic bearing and sartorial flair.

The origins of Scheryn are less mercantile, however, than the separate business interests of these two co-founders. They are rooted in a long personal history that includes a shared interest in collecting art including African contemporary art. “If you like things, you want to collect,” Steyn explained the impulse. “Once you’ve got a level of collection ... then you start looking at it and it’s like a coin collection. You are missing one. And you have to have the whole lot to make it worth something. You start seeing gaps in your collection.” The initial idea for Scheryn was marinated in

⁷² Its China Balanced Feeder fund returned top performing results for 2015, according to Moneyweb. The fund, which invests in Chinese equities, bonds and cash, returned 45.64% in 2014 and grew another 57.26% in 2015, according to Morningstar figures.

late-night discussion in a Beijing restaurant over Peking duck. Considering that there was no art investment fund in Africa, they decided to launch one together given their mutual interest in art. Initially, this largely unfolded under the direction of Steyn until an administrator was appointed during the research period (Brett Scott) who then became the collection's manager. Scheryn's operations were subsequently run from a work space in central Cape Town, sharing premises with a commercial gallery. Others who joined the affiliated team during the research period took responsibility for client liaison and marketing, including Christine Van Heerden and Sarah Malherbe, in addition to the two independent art advisors, Botha and Washkansky.

Scott's task, in addition to managing the collection, was to build a business case for the management company. At the start, this included fees from managing the underlying fund but the idea was to gear into other related activities in future, such as managing third-party collections under an advisory arm. This could be for people who were part of Scheryn or independent. This advisory service would be one way to subsidise the collection's management. Artworks in the collection could also be loaned for a fee. There were hopes for a permanent exhibition space in time to showcase curated exhibitions.

Art collateral was also under consideration in Scheryn's initial fund prospectus; if that ever happened, borrowing against artworks would not exceed 25% of the fund's NAV. Another possibility was co-operating with an existing bank's wealth management service and this was actively pursued during the research period.⁷³ Scheryn also intended to create a foundation to help support galleries and artists. Anticipated sources of revenue in the same prospectus included: fees (management, subscription, performance); income from leasing artworks; sale of artworks; income from art advisory service; undistributed returns from sale. Expenses included: initial setup; salaries to advisory board and fund administrator; external expenses (auditors, bank charges, valuations); storage; insurance; collection curating; renting; legal consulting; social responsibility; investor events; and tax. Different types of risk highlighted in the prospectus included passive investment, long-term investment, liquidity risk (low liquidity, high transaction costs and highly differentiated products),

⁷³ In December 2017, this co-operation was well underway with two institutions to offer art advisory for their private clients ('Scheryn Services'). This potential benefit for the management company could be considered a form of derivative value as it leverages the reputation of the collection, and Chapter 6 takes this notion forward.

market risk, legal risk, tax risk, authenticity risk (when the authenticity of an artwork is disputed) and title risk.

A chief complication in launching the Scheryn initiative was finding a feasible structure, Steyn recalled. The initial framework, devised with the help of some legal experts, was somewhat complex but eventually a company was set up and seed capital deployed. That initial basic structure was a private trust with two trustees – Herman Steyn and a newly created management company; the company was effectively split 50/50 between Steyn and Chen. The trust's name was initially Scheryn Art Collectors Fund Trust and its partners were also the beneficiaries. The trustees were governed by a Fund Charter. The trustees in turn appointed an Advisory Board. That board was responsible for screening the art scene and advising on new artworks to buy and would also advise what artworks if any to sell. In addition to the advisors, there was also less formal engagement with experts based elsewhere.

As already detailed, this structure shifted in 2017 into two more distinct entities. Scheryn Art Collection Trust on the one hand comprised trustees and advisors. Separately, the Scheryn Art Collection, a private limited company, comprised a board of directors and a collection manager. In short, the private trust administered and invested the capital contributions of the beneficiaries. The technical structure was open-ended, which meant there were unlimited 'shares' (units) available in the underlying investment. But ideally, Scheryn aimed to attract six to ten large collectors to join over time. Potential participants were invitation-only; the trust was not open or marketed to the general public as a retail offering; it was a private entity. The initial minimum capital contribution upon launch in 2015 was R500,000. This was raised during the research period to R5 million, at the discretion of the management team. These future contributions would grant acquisition capital for buying new artworks for the collection.

According to the original prospectus, a subscription fee of between 1% and 3% applied, depending on the capital contribution level. The investor's contribution could be in cash or NAV of artwork equivalent, determined by independent valuers. The annual management fee was set at 2%. A performance fee of 10% was also payable after a 6% threshold, calculated by an increase in the fund's NAV. The performance fee remained in the fund and could be converted into units as bonus units or to pay

salaries. The management and subscription fees would be used to pay the initial setup expenses of the fund; thereafter it paid operating costs and salaries.

The overall approach to acquisitions was to diversify, acquiring artworks at fair price and to create added value. The desired asset allocation at launch was: 20% Masters; 50% contemporary African; 20% young and emerging artists; 10% short-term transactions. There was no discrimination on medium and no minimum holding period for artworks. Value creation strategies included publications and lending artworks to keep the collection visible and relevant (showcasing). The latter could include temporary exhibitions, museum shows, international art exhibitions, foundations, special events and art fairs locally and abroad. Scheryn representatives regularly attended the latter to scout for works – notably Art Basel, Frieze, 1:54 and other African art exhibitions, as well as the Venice Biennale, a global artworld node. In 2017, Scheryn was one of the private sponsors of the South African pavilion in Venice. The African Art in Venice Forum, a two-day series of discussion during its opening week in May, included Steyn and Chen, as speakers on the topic of art collecting. They also attended the Cape Town and Joburg art fairs. In 2016, Joburg Art Fair joined the continental trend with an East African focus.

Steyn did not view acquiring African contemporary art as buying into the so-called ‘Africa rising’ narrative. The continental collecting focus did not extend to an endorsement of how well a government was run, and he gave a short economics recap to illustrate. Currency was the barometer by which you measured countries, he said, so the performance of the Rand told this story for South Africa. Currencies would essentially adjust by the relative inflation, in turn a measure of productivity. That spoke to education, motivation, work ethic, efficiency, and other related factors. There was a line of ‘fair value’ and sentiment that drove swings around that line, which had a rising trend over time. This line of fair value reflected the concept of purchasing power parity (PPP). When Steyn launched Prescient in 1998, by way of example, the exchange rate was about R7.50 to the Dollar; in 2015, it was reaching R12.50, which was PPP. Levels around R18 reflected sentiment. But if the currency reflected systemic issues, it would not regain PPP; the latter would reflect currency fluctuations instead as inflation rose. In that scenario, higher returns needed to be generated.

This recap led me to reconsider the research problem corollary posed in Chapter 1: what in turn does contemporary art take the measure of? Currency was the barometer by which to measure countries. Could it be possible that art was an alternative currency in a non-pecuniary sense – a contemporary barometer which took a measure of society as it moved? Chapter 6 revisits and extends this idea.

c) A co-founder's view

I sat for interview with Dabing Chen in the boardroom of Chenshia Group, near the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town, at a gleaming table with heavy wooden chairs and artworks on the walls, to discuss his role in co-founding Scheryn. Chen said he believed in the African Renaissance of former South African president Thabo Mbeki's vision: "Through my work the last 30 years in Africa, I can see that the moment has come and it's time that Africa takes its proper position in the global community in every aspect as it deserves, including art".⁷⁴ His interest in co-founding Scheryn was informed by his own interest in collecting art. Over the past 30 years, he has accumulated a collection focused upon six key areas. These include Tibetan Tangka to contemporary times, including almost 200 works of antiquity Tibetan art and a permanent display of major Tibetan pieces in an affiliated museum. He also collects African contemporary art and some antiquity, art from some minority groups in China (there are 56 ethnic groups) in particular a region in southwestern China that he has chosen to specialise in, historical artefacts or documenta, and photography. Mediums in the collection range from watercolours to oils, prints, charcoal and pastel as well as Chinese traditional painting, calligraphy and sculpture.

Chen said the boom in art funds in China from about 2006 to 2008 was more about speculation than genuine investment vehicles and as a result only a few did well. "In Africa, we are the first one and Africa needs one," he said, speaking in September 2016 in the early days of Scheryn's setup. "We specialise in Africa – art from Africa, relating to Africa, the African expatriates living overseas but mostly African themed. Nobody is doing that at this moment. It's a niche market for us. Especially with the Chinese purchasing power raising interest in Africa, I am looking at future

⁷⁴ Comments in this section are drawn from a personal interview (16 September 2016).

relationships with China ... to collaborate to promote African art. There is great investment potential from China.”

Art carried its own risks so Chen believed it was definitely an alternative investment that only high-net-worth individuals could realise. Again, he stressed the long term as part of Scheryn’s strategy and related his own experience by way of example. “I collect[ed] a piece of art 25 years ago for R6,000 and it is now worth at least \$6 million,” he said. “I just knew this artist will be worth something. Such things happen – not every piece is like that – but all my collection now after 20 years [has grown] say 100 per cent minimum.” Financial returns aside, Chen thought art had a vital role to play for society. “I think it records our history and lets us feel what is going on in society as it happens. Also, it predicts in a certain way our future direction of mankind.”

The aim was to institutionalise the Scheryn Collection, Chen said, into a profit-sharing initiative. “If we do the right work we will be successful. We have a lot of people sharing a common idea about it. The short-term investment is never going to work in art. If you want to play short term, go to the stock market. For art, it is long-term investment. And according to my own experience, it is the most profitable long-term investment – while you are appreciating your life, appreciating the art.”

5.7. Valuation

This case study sought to reflect upon extrinsic valuation, or how artworks come to matter in the broader artworld. Scheryn needed a method to revalue its portfolio of artworks as it matured – in part, because new investors would have to buy in at a level that correctly represented current value and this eventuality indeed transpired when Viljoen joined. Another reason for revaluation would be to release gains, one of the ways it could potentially return benefits to members. This process connects the Scheryn case study back to August House, where revaluation of the building was the key catalyst. As a new collector came on board, the issue of revaluation in the Scheryn case study likewise took a central role. This section will explore this process to further understand Scheryn’s approach to valuation and its link to structural thinking.

Artwork valuation for Scheryn was initially conducted on a trial basis by the economics firm, Econex, previously involved with managing the Capi (Citadel Art Price Index). Advisors would have to check on these valuations and the directors sign off. “It’s difficult to value art – you don’t know exactly,” Steyn said of this initial setup. Econex drew on data starting in 2000, including over 40,000 artworks. Its technical method was hedonic regression analysis which valued artworks for their utility-bearing characteristics. This breaks down the item being investigated into constituent parts and obtains estimates of the contributory value of each part. The idea is that aesthetic value and social prestige for instance represents a utility dividend.⁷⁵ Specifically, this analysis took into account auction house, auction date, artist, title, size, hammer price, if the artwork was signed and dated, if the artwork was titled, and nine different mediums. A key critique of this approach is whether the good in question can be divided into such constituent parts.⁷⁶ As Candela & Scorcu point out, this relies on knowledge of all the complex influences driving art market prices (1997: 178). Hedonic regression was one of four ways to derive price indices; the others were geometric means, average prices and repeat sales regressions (Campbell, 2007: 66). According to the Scheryn prospectus, this technique allowed the valuation to control for quality changes between different artworks. The process helped overcome two key difficulties when valuing the art market: diversity and the infrequency of transactions (Econex, 2012: 7).

An example of this method, in Figure 68 below, is calculated by Econex for artwork by Cecil Skotnes. The graph generated was based upon 626 observations between 2000 and 2014. Predicted values depended on the activated variables used in the model and the sample. Hedonic value was just one way of assessing value in consumer research, and it related to a perceived benefit. There were other ways to approach value in consumer literature, which address more fully the complexity of the issue. These included utilitarian or functional value (for its use), the benefit of being connected socially to others, reputational value and epistemic value (gaining new knowledge from an object or experience) (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016: 523).

⁷⁵ See Mandel (2009) for utility dividend, a special feature of demand for luxury goods, and its relationship to the value of art.

⁷⁶ See Throsby (1994) for limitations of utility theory as it applies to cultural value.

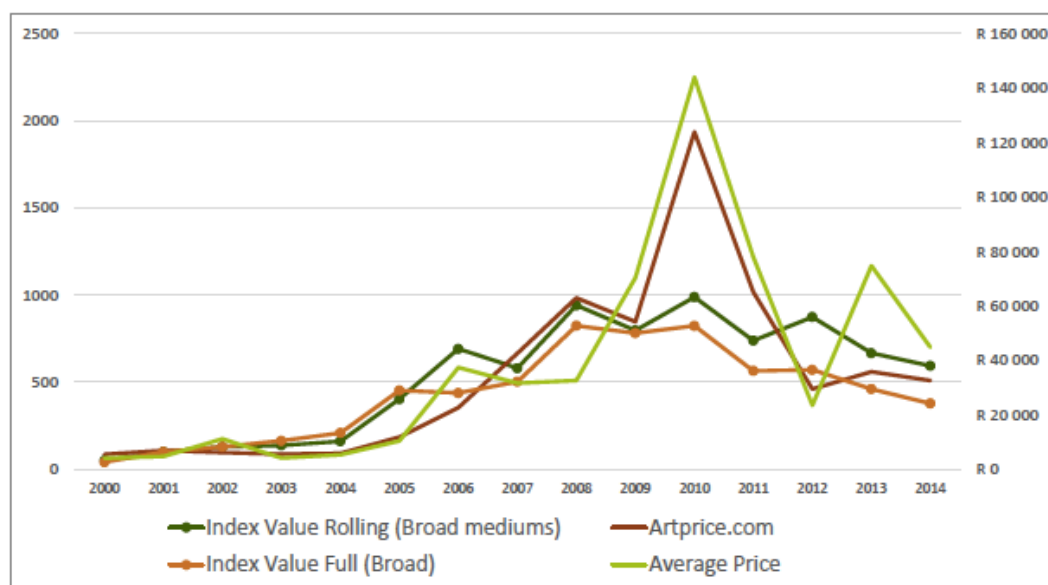


Fig. 68: Cecil Skotnes indices. Source: Econex.

Scheryn's engagement with valuation moved organically from this point, over the research period. Econex analysis was discontinued as Scheryn's own team was further assembled and valuations were dealt with in a more practical and applied manner. During the key startup phase, revaluation effectively amounted to the gallery discount – this is the difference between the wall price (gallery price) and the cost price (what Scheryn actually paid for it). The market value of the artwork was taken as equivalent to the wall price. This approach in effect reinforced the importance of gallery representation: without the gallery and its commission factored into this wall price, the market value dropped by some margin. (Wall price includes gallery commission, usually around 40% of the artist's price, and significant discounts may be offered to key buyers.) Another related aspect to consider with this valuation method was tax. The actual purchase price included Value Added Tax (VAT) but the valuation did not. For this reason, the gallery discount had to be significant to make any paper gains. This method worked for this startup phase because the acquisitions were largely made through galleries, and because it was too early in any event to expect any meaningful recalibrations.

As things progressed, and the collection acquired more work from overseas sources, valuation process shifted again to factor in foreign currency differentials.

Paradoxically, infrastructure realities meant it was often easier to buy a work from London than from some African cities. Furthermore, buying a work in Rands that

traded in Dollars or Euros, for instance, increased in financial value when the Dollar or Euro strengthened; and vice versa. Buying African contemporary art from overseas intermediaries might appear counter-intuitive but it reflected a global market, according to Steyn, and was just the way things now worked. It even added to the value of the art: “It’s actually almost what you want because ... [it’s] art that the world likes.”

This kind of geographical arbitrage could have a significant impact on the portfolio. For instance, in July 2016, Steyn said the Rand had fallen 30%, so everything that was priced in Dollars was worth 30% more. Works by William Kentridge and Roger Ballen were examples of this. A major issue was therefore deciding which works were Rand-based and which works could be tagged in a foreign currency. By way of example, the work of Robin Rhode was Dollar-based; Scheryn acquired it denominated in Rands, which at the time equated to a 50% difference in price. Timing of acquisitions then also became more important: for instance, a work bought in Italy but priced in Rands became a lot more expensive when local currency weakened over one particular month (from R17 to R14 against the Dollar). In that case, the transaction was fortuitously carried out at the original Rand quotation and Scheryn benefited. Likewise, a work acquired from London was set in Rands, and the transaction effected as the exchange rate dropped from R24 to R19 to the Pound. But there was equal potential to lose from currency fluctuations.

Some local transactions were concluded in foreign currencies but others were concluded in local currency while their market value was in fact pegged in Dollars or Euros, which increased complexity of valuation calculations.⁷⁷ These works all need to be valued correctly in the portfolio – and in a broader scenario where the Rand was constantly in flux. Steyn said of this volatility: “You identify the artists that you want and you go and buy them when you get the right piece. You can’t let these fluctuations deter you ... Sometimes you are going to make mistakes but that is not a disaster. Find your good ones and then chase them.” He cited an example of an artist whose work he bought, and whose work was now 30% cheaper following Brexit fluctuations of the Pound. “If I think this is a temporary thing, I should have the guts to just go and buy more of him, if I want more of him. Because they will probably

⁷⁷ The first time I became aware of this kind of arbitrage was visiting an exhibition at Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg where all the artworks on show were priced in foreign currency.

have to change their price.” Since the art market was not that efficient, it took awhile for fluctuations to get factored in and this could be in favour but only for acquisitions that would have been made in any case. “Those opportunities exist – you can use turmoil to maybe accelerate things you would have done. But it should always be things that you would have done ... Otherwise you are not being true to your collection,” he added.

Another method of revaluing artworks that developed over time was comparative estimates, mostly from auction results, which could give an indication of the worth of a particular piece in the collection. The collection manager used this indicator whenever feasible. The samples, however, were often small so comparable works were not that easy to come by.

Finally, going forward, it was intended that independent valuation would be conducted by the collection’s art advisors on acquisitioned works that warranted it. Botha, an advisor to the collection, said international secondary market value was an important reference but valuation was actually an holistic task that took account of numerous factors including the artwork’s relationship to other works in the collection. As she indicated earlier: “I am less interested in the price and more interested in how this artist has grown – is the work a once-off, is it produced from a career of 40 years, was it a highlight of a particular period? You look at the person and where the work fits” (personal interview, 2017). She pointed out for instance that a collation of William Kentridge, Robert Hodgins, Deborah Bell, Gerhard Marx and Willem Boshoff taken together would accrue a special value over and above their individual merit. This emphasised the importance of the collective, a common concept between case studies, and the key concept of the web.

Revaluations during the research period were in practice intermittent because of the youth of the fund. The collections manager produced a revaluation for the fund as a whole but many works in the collection did not yet warrant it. Steyn said revaluation would happen more regularly as the collection got fully established but there was no compelling reason during this phase. For instance, 23 new works were acquired to June 2017; it would clearly be too early to re-assess. I also took from this a demonstration Scheryn was more interested in establishing the collection towards its long-term goals. That said, according to its own estimates, the fund more or less

doubled in value during the research period to R19.7 million by year-end 2016. These were internal approximations based on wall prices and taking currency differentials into account. That total value excluded liabilities but included payable duties, taxes, and shipping costs. After Viljoen joined, that internally calculated NAV jumped to R55 million at December 2017.

Giles Peppiatt at Bonhams agreed that valuation was a tricky issue. He said a problem with art funds for instance was that they often relied on valuations and equated these to the price paid, but such estimates were largely untested. “Most art is ultimately sold for less than it was bought for – and that is never reported [in the media] ... Of all the art ever produced, only 0.01 per cent sells for more than it cost to produce,” Peppiatt cautioned. “To value a work of art is very difficult” (personal interview, 2015). The criteria that Scheryn would officially factor in is detailed below. But in reality the actual selection process was far more holistic, as earlier statements from Botha and Viljoen set out. Valuation was more nuanced: it had less to do with financial criteria, which was largely about paying fair value, and more to do with the artwork content, its impact, and what meaning it could add to the collection – in short, public interest over income. Arriving at this assessment demanded an informed eye that could respond to works both in the flesh and in two-dimensional representations at acquisition meetings, and factor in the criteria listed below.

Quality criteria	Primary or secondary market	Resale prediction (artist development)
historical significance of the artwork	comparison of prices of other artworks of the artist	where the artwork lies in the career of the artist
rarity	auction history of artist	how does the artwork compare to other works of same artist, or artists of same school
physical condition	provenance/ exhibition history of artwork	artist development
restoration facts	verifying documents	liquidity of the artwork
year of the artwork	demand for similar artwork in the market	
collection / series / standalone	when it was last exhibited or available in the market	
	subsequent purchases of the same or similar	

Table 5: Valuation process (Scheryn prospectus, 2015).

Ultimately, valuation was a test of time. Steyn acknowledged that sometimes good choices initially met opposition from others that you had to ride out. “Everybody likes it more if it’s appreciated in value. And you’ve identified something, you’ve done something right, it’s valuable, it feels good. To be able to buy something [like that] when other people don’t like it but you do, that’s a kick.” It is also fun if you can pick artists and watch them going through various stages, he added. Critically, the artwork must have merit. And work should be representative of that artist’s output – for newer artists that was often difficult to fathom. “You have to actually *look* at the art. Some people can just look at art and know it’s worth something.”

5.8. Conclusion: structural thinking

This chapter extended the August House research on studio production, or how artworks become matter, to the intermediaries that form the switching points in determining how artworks come to matter. Part I focused upon the Scheryn Art Collection and its collecting ethos amid a broader context of ‘African contemporary art’. Part II focused upon the underlying Scheryn Art Collection Trust and its approach to valuation in the broader context of the art market.

The chapter began by asking how a private collection of African contemporary art assembled for both aesthetic pleasure and profit dealt with uncertainty, the first key concept in the thesis. The answer was also about collectivity but differently understood to August House and its self-organised collectives. For Scheryn, collectivity comprised a series of formal structuring strategies connected to valuation, or how assessments were made about which artworks mattered and on what basis and hence whether or not to accession them into the collection. Once again, it was a catalytic disruptive event that brought the process of valuation to the fore: a buy-in to the Scheryn collective. In the case of August House, disruption from revaluation emphasised linkages between space and imagination. In the case of Scheryn, the role of intermediaries was highlighted. Whereas the studio focused upon intrinsic value and artistic thinking in response to uncertainty, this chapter focused upon extrinsic valuation and found what I called structural thinking.

This nested capacity is detailed in the synthesis of Chapter 6. As segueway, there are three key elements that exemplified this structural thinking in the research. Firstly, the

technical structure of the collection as fractal ownership derives from the world of collective investment funds. Scheryn structured its operating mechanism as a private trust that collectors could buy into; its partners consequently owned all the artworks in the portfolio and none of the artworks in particular. This pooling structure meant they had partial ownership of the entire collection and could call for selected artworks when desired. The technical mechanism is based on joint and partial ownership. This shifts ownership to a collective, as well as separating ownership from outright possession, as Chapter 6 elaborates upon.

Related, the organising principle of the tree gave conceptual structure to the collection. This was conceptualised by art advisor Amanda Botha and allowed the collection to creatively organise artwork acquisitions both for their distinctive qualities and their interrelationships. Interestingly enough, a ‘decision tree’ in economics is an aid to decision-making in uncertain conditions. The economic version sets out alternative courses of action and the economic consequences of each, and assigns subjective statistical probabilities to the likelihood of future events occurring (Pass, Lowes & Davies, 1988: 113). That kind of decision-making involves risk, where large amounts of information are available upon which to base estimates of likelihood, so that accurate statistical probabilities could be formulated; uncertainty, on the other hand, arises from changes that are difficult to predict or from events whose likelihood could not be accurately estimated (Pass, Lowes & Davies, 1988: 464). Anna Dempster has likewise pointed out that uncertainty is immeasurable with possible outcomes neither knowable nor predictable, whereas risk is measurable and associated with a specific probability or likelihood of an outcome (Dempster, 2014: 28). As we heard from both Steyn and Viljoen, uncertainty was not something either was unduly concerned about – either in their investments or their artwork selections.

This leads to the second point: uncertainty was considered part of the territory while manageable risk mitigation was left to formal filtering mechanisms. Consider, for instance, the risk of a high-priced artwork – according to Steyn, either there was very little risk involved because somebody else wanted it, or there was massive risk because of its high price and few people who could afford it. It depended on how you viewed the situation. Buying fads was another highlighted risk. And different mediums had different risk profiles, Steyn added – photography (because

reproducible in theory) was cheaper to insure and easier to move around, for example. Photography was generally insured at replacement value and other mediums at market value. Steyn summed the situation up: “At the end of the day, we come to the value of African contemporary art. And if you compare it to contemporary art globally, everybody overseas is paying big prices ... so I think that we are still somewhat undiscovered, there is not a lot of downside. It’s a good time to get in now and that reduces the risk.”

The management team itself helped reduce artwork risk by acting as professional custodian and applying the appropriate mandates, Steyn pointed out. Buying from galleries was another fundamental risk mitigation mechanism and demonstrated in its filtering function an aspect of structural thinking. Galleries managed the artist’s trajectory and therefore reduced risk associated with purchasing work, while potential discounts enhanced valuation. In addition to having a good reason to buy an artist, the gallery that stood behind them must know their business and believe in an artist’s future trajectory and give them airtime, Steyn reckoned. “You can’t just believe what they say, you must watch what they do. If [artists] are with very good galleries, the galleries present them well, and they are highly respected by the gallery, then there is traction.” The appeal of this formal acquisition channel was partly to do with authentication and validation trails. “Most of the gallerists I’ve met in South Africa are quite good at their job ... They have good artists and [the process] is valuable. We engage a lot with them in terms of what is going on. The more you collect, the higher your standing is, the better deals you will also get. They are able to introduce you to artists ... They do a filtering job and market the artists, and they monitor the works.”

Viljoen, as a collector in his own right, agreed that high-quality intermediaries like gallerists had broader knowledge and time to go and look for new things; they could filter the artworld and bring back the better work. “That increases the odds that the work I buy will have a lasting impact because the artist’s output has been curated by the gallerist who has done so with a good intention. If you are an artist and you sit there on your own in your studio and you are painting away, sometimes you lose sight of the forest for the trees. An outside agent like a gallerist can help you just step back and take a look at the bigger picture ... I think that is very valuable for an artist so you don’t get caught up in doing the same thing over and over and over again” (personal interview, 2016). Galleries also ensured the integrity and the quality of the art, he

added. “I don’t have time to go to all the studios and meet up with all the artists and find out exactly what is going on. Galleries curate the artists’ work on the one hand and filter the information flow on the other.”

This segues into a third demonstration of structural thinking: collecting required a different way of looking, a shift in perspective that allowed for paradox. In fact, the approach of the counter-intuitive move was something Scheryn arguably had in common with the August House atelier. The building’s sale, for instance, required someone with a contrarian view to perceive its true value as discounted owing to the hijacked building next door. The property developer who facilitated the sale described his counter-intuitive thinking in this way. A parallel was evident with Scheryn. Its members were also successful businessmen managing companies, two of whom running successful investment vehicles. They dealt with risk and uncertainty on a daily basis, albeit differently conceived, and were quite used to making counterintuitive calls and seeking global anomalies. Opting to acquire artwork from the continent at a time of broader economic uncertainty also required a different way of looking and willingness to enter the fray, regardless of macro-economic change and market volatility.

During the second half of 2015, it was a difficult time for all asset classes because of a convergence of events, from a commodity rout to a slowdown in China and oil prices in a generally low-growth environment. Exchange rates also fluctuated widely. But Steyn did not concern himself with global macro-economic conditions when it came to the collection’s artwork acquisitions. “We can’t predict those things – we don’t know where it’s going to end,” he said. “Markets always recover eventually anyway. You buy in March, you’re going to live through all the cycles, buy it for a long time. If there is a crunch and art prices come off, it’s fine – you just collect more.” It was not about looking at your collection on a short-term monetary basis, he added; you must rather assemble a collection you want to have and then you become a bit more immune to exogenous factors: “You want to keep it – irrespective of what happens.”

Viljoen had the same attitude to larger global conditions of flux: he did not try to guess the cards but played the hand he was dealt, as he put it. And he stressed that in the artworld, risk and uncertainty were approached very differently to the financial

world. An investment manager was a person who managed risk and minimised uncertainty, Viljoen explained. “As a value investor, we make sure the price we pay is so low that we are compensated for adverse outcomes, or risk. A momentum investor would pay a high price and hope that things continue in the same pattern. We manage uncertainty primarily by the price we pay.” Risk, he said, was acknowledging that today 50 things could happen but only one would transpire. Uncertainty was therefore good, he said, because it threw up all sorts of opportunities. “Human beings hate uncertainty. Forecasts give people a false sense of comfort. They get it wrong all the time. And that makes opportunities in the investment world – people get disappointed or emotional about their investment, selling and buying, the price distorts and that gives people like us opportunities.” But in the artworld, uncertainty was something very different – it was not around issues of [financial] value as such. “I don’t care about that. What I care about is: *will this piece of art still be relevant in five years, ten years, 20 years’ time? Will it be able to hold its own against whatever is coming out at that time?*” This remark really encapsulated the idea of value as understood by the collector in this case study.

Indeed, Rachel Pownall wrote in an article on boutique art funds: “For contemporary work, the uncertainty surrounding who will go down in art history as the key artists of today is unknown, or at best debatable” (Pownall, 2014: 169). It helped that the call on which artists would in future be key was unrestrained in Scheryn by more formal institutional processes like those of museums, as Steyn pointed out. He said that a private collection was free to experiment and make mistakes in a more dynamic process that also brought fun into the collection of art.

In addition to uncertainty, the other key concept this chapter extended was mobility. The research methodology in this case study was the same as August House: to follow the things (artworks) themselves. In Chapter 4, the meaning of the tracked artworks was understood to be performed in motion. In Chapter 5, the tracked artworks moved by proxy rather than physical journeys. This manifestation of Glissant’s detour expanded ideas about what mobility could mean, and in turn the artwork as a vector of value. The artworks became a store of indexical value and highlighted these registrations from other spaces and time-travelling contexts (5.3.). This dematerialised the artwork and opened up the possibility for derivative forms of value, which Chapter 6 expands upon. The artworks also embodied distinct thematics that offered

to take the viewer on a journey from their own experience into other worlds, or implied spaces. In addition, this demonstration of detour served to refocus attention upon the underlying structure of the collection and the technical processes described.

Jessica Webster is a painter from Johannesburg whom Amanda Botha flagged as following in the footsteps of the Siopis legacy. In May 2017, Scheryn acquired some of Webster's work. On a guided gallery tour of her newly exhibited paintings, she described her process including deliberately disruptive moments on the canvas as "the bad idea", introduced as off-key elements. These moments remained as traces in the paintings, creating a palimpsest. "It's about how to bring the work alive without losing the sense of the dead moment," she explained. Webster said she aimed to shift dimensions in the mind by allowing a multifaceted thing to come about in her paintings, with a degree of presence – in turn, a product of time and care. This artistic thinking was resolved in the act of making: "I can't sit and think about it from the outside," she said (author's notes, 2017). Her work offered a visual manifestation of this knowledge or artistic thinking, with its paradoxical embrace of the unknown, and Scheryn's acquisition formally validated the selected series as artwork that mattered.

The next chapter formalises this kind of fusion. This final step of grounded theory brings together the two case studies of the studio nest and the collection tree, linking shared key concepts (uncertainty, mobility and the web) to make corresponding findings and propositions for the artworld ecosystem.

Chapter 6: The synthesis

Driving to my first Scheryn meeting where new acquisitions were discussed, I noticed signboards to the side of Rhodes Drive. Car lights revealed them at night – a butterfly, an endangered toad, a flower, a chameleon, a fish, a tortoise. The signs were part of VoiceMap, an audio app that tells an immersive story triggered by geolocation markers. This particular story was called *The Endemic Project*. It reminded me that I was thinking about the research in terms of an ecosystem, fusing Coole's micro, macro and meso tiers of investigation. The two case studies detailed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 investigated notions of intrinsic value and extrinsic valuation respectively through the metaphor of the nest (the micro level of the studio) and the tree (the macro level of the collection). They revealed artistic thinking and structural thinking, respectively. This chapter brings these two modalities into dialogue to reconsider the sustainability of the artworld ecosystem (meso level) by reading the implications of each case study through the other. The results of that process might be called wishful thinking, understood as "a transformative hinge towards re-imagining realities" (Gurney, 2018: 34).

That dialogue implements Karen Barad's diffraction or material-discursive practice introduced earlier – that is, reading different perspectives through each other in an expanded new materialism across disciplinary boundaries. That diffraction process generates three key factors for alternative notions of value: *nested capacity*, *the right to follow*, and *contemporary art as a public good*. They link back to the key concepts set out in Chapter 1 and derive from them: *uncertainty*, *mobility*, and *the web*. These concepts and corresponding factors are then deployed into propositions about artworld sustainability, which the Conclusion (Chapter 7) makes clear. In so doing, the research moves beyond Bennett's vitalism to also reflect upon the circuits through which matter flows, and to "better appreciate the challenges current forms of production and consumption involve and to think realistically about ways to potentially transform them" (Coole, 2013: 463).

6.1. Nested capacity

To recap, the research followed the things themselves, looking out for nodes of value transfiguration in the tracked artwork journeys and their catalysts, starting from the

studio and moving outwards. This linear intention was disrupted by unforeseen events in both case studies, a buy-out and a buy-in, which triggered uncertainty – the first key concept. Responses to this uncertainty were key to research findings and propositions for increased resilience of the artworld ecosystem. The major coping strategy was to structure more resilient collective forms, or nested capacity (defined below); each case study had different ways of apprehending collectivity and going about it. Numerous observations led to this insight.

Firstly, collectivity was necessitated by disruption. The fundamental example in the studio case study was August House being earmarked for sale, just as the research period began. About 18 months later, this resulted in a buy-out by Quorum Property Group of the existing shareholders in August House Property Limited. In the process, the building was revalued. This sale period ushered in an interregnum of uncertainty. Artists had to relocate and the building had to find a new footing. This turn of events surfaced latent linkages between space and imagination and, as we saw, these were evident in artistic responses. August House artists initially struggled to make sense of their new reality and they variously resisted the implications, likened in the analysis to Glissant's notion of detour and the ruse. "The first move in a critical direction involves indignation, a vigorously but superficially argued rejection of a situation deemed unacceptable", as Chiapello writes (2004: 586). They ultimately came to terms, however, and turned the enforced transition and their initial refusal in their favour. In so doing, they opted for self-organised, collaborative setups that differently leveraged resources in a re-imagination to benefit a broader set of people.

This key catalytic event, the disruption from the building's sale, also flagged structural factors operating outside the studio door that impacted upon life within – hence the rationale for the second case study. Tracking the assemblage of a private art collection offered an opportunity to observe the pathways of extrinsic valuation in which artworks travelled. That case study was in turn bookended by disruption of another kind – a buy-in rather than a buy-out. At the end of the research period, a new member joined Scheryn and 236 of his artworks followed. Piet Viljoen had just shut down his private art museum in Cape Town. He consequently engaged Scheryn, primarily to benefit from economies of scale in managing and exhibiting a private collection, and re-imagined the form his collection could take. This decision cued the advantage of nested capacity (Cruz, 2016: 10), detailed below.

Gordon Froud's transfiguration of his situation is emblematic of this first key insight of nested capacity. Studio relocation was difficult for all the tenants but Froud in particular had a vast volume of artefacts to move. His new location at Nugget Square was a light industrial complex in City and Suburban, located in Johannesburg inner city only a few streets from Doornfontein. Jacki McInnes moved there too and both artists bought their studio spaces this time around. That transaction was significant: it changed their position as tenants into property owners, which was not an option at August House despite three of the four tracked artists wishing to purchase. That atelier was owned by four shareholders who did not wish to sell off individual units.

Over the ensuing months, more artists joined Froud at Nugget Square and the precinct became an art hub. I visited in May 2017, the day before Froud launched his new Nugget Square space to the public. The new unit he bought had been configured into a studio, with living quarters on a mezzanine level. But more significantly, and true to his collaborative style, Froud had expanded into the next-door warehouse and built spaces other artists could also benefit from. These included a gallery on ground level and a drawing and printmaking studio as well as small residency space for visiting artists on the upper level. Notably, Froud's new Stokvel Gallery had an innovative operating model. It was structured collaboratively, based on the South African idea of a 'stokvel'. This is an informal savings club where each invited member contributes and takes it in turn to benefit from the pooled resources. It is really a homegrown idea of 'commoning' (Chatterton, 2010), developed within the so-called informal or social economy. The idea behind Stokvel Gallery was that artists participated financially through a regular contribution or member's fee, and in return they could show their work for a fixed time period on a rotating basis. The exhibiting artist at Stokvel has to take personal responsibility for operating the gallery during their exhibition run. It is emblematic of the desire for new forms of co-operation and collectivity which the structural realities of art production induce.

Froud's transfiguration of space in his relocation from August House is absolutely central, in numerous ways, to drawing conclusions from the research project. Firstly, the artist changed his relationship from a tenant to property owner and this gave him more security. Any infrastructural renovations were also for his own benefit, which enabled the spatial reconfigurations to occur. When he made these renovations, he employed other artists to assist and favoured recycled materials in the build. Buying

his new studio space also ended the cycle of continual relocations at the behest of landlords. Froud initially moved to August House from Newtown, where he had workspace at the Carfax building. His studio building there was sold at short notice. This repeated scenario of having to move on every few years was clearly conveyed by the frustrations of other August House artists in the case study. We heard about Buthelezi's studio migrations in Chapter 4. Likewise, Venter moved from a studio space in Newtown to Doornfontein following a government-initiated attempt to turn Newtown into a so-called cultural precinct. Many artists then moved to edgier, and cheaper, spaces. Venter commented on this never-ending cycle of relocations: "In every big city in the world, these kind of things happen. Artists move in because they are creative and need space but are prepared to live under weird circumstances. Then they get phased out when it becomes too expensive, and they move to the next thing" (personal interview, 2014).

Vulnerability extended beyond security of tenure to the low income that artists generally earned.⁷⁸ Froud's spatial reconfigurations were secondly a way for him to cross-subsidise the sustainability of his own practice. The drawing studio, for instance, could in future host paid-for classes and events, he predicted. Furthermore, Stokvel Gallery offered a collective artist-led solution to engage with artworld structures on its own terms. Froud has an extensive and valuable network, cultivated over the years through a combination of artistic practice, curatorship and teaching. He previously ran a commercial gallery, Gordart, in Melville that over time propelled many emergent artists into the professional artworld. Gordart moved to Rosebank and later closed down. True to style, Froud turned his Nugget Square studio into another collective space that others could benefit from.

Thirdly, this development helped anchor a constellation of artists who settled in the same precinct once Froud discovered it. These observations were all examples of collectivity in response to the disruption of the unforeseen. In particular, the stokvel is a peculiarly South African example of what Kouoh called "forms we should embrace again somehow"; its ethos helps forge other conceptions of value from a global South perspective rather than predicated on an 'elsewhere'. It offers a self-made solution with a South African inflection of commoning as it already exists in the social fabric.

⁷⁸ This point is made by a recent report on artists' workspaces in London, which among other things found 28% of studios under threat over the next five years ('Artists' workspace study ...', 2014: 7).

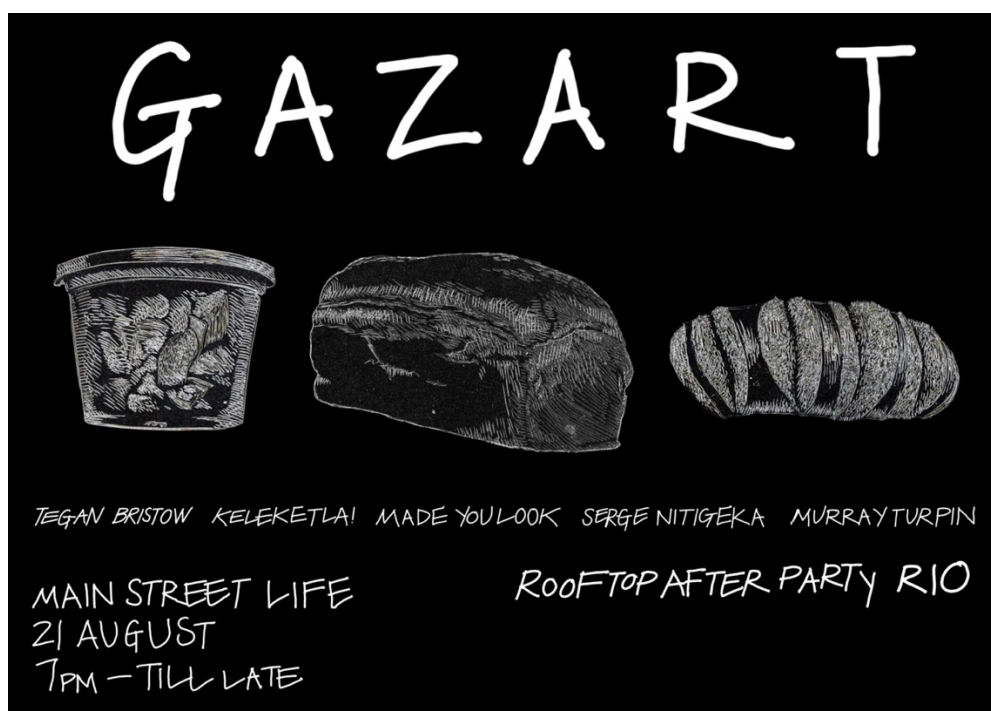


Fig. 69: Credit: Gazart.

Indeed, there is merit in trying to understand public space as it is already constituted and extrapolating creative solutions from there, according to Molemo Moiloa, director of VANSAs⁷⁹ and also an artist in a collective duo with Nare Mokgotho called *Madeyoulook*. For instance, street culture in Johannesburg, while primarily transient and very dynamic, also exhibited specific public practices that constituted a connectivity – people connected to one another in often quite formal ways, person-to-person or person-to-group, Moiloa said (personal interview, 2015). She suggested these already existing forms offered alternative ways of developing creative responses to the city, constituting public relations and public space. One example she cites, akin to the stokvel, is another South African phenomenon called ‘gazating’, or ‘koezating’, which is pooling limited resources to fulfil something common to a collective. This may occur for instance when everybody in a communal taxi pools their money to pay for one seat that is either empty or unaccounted for; it is also a term used to gather coins to collectively buy food to be shared.⁸⁰ *Madeyoulook* previously partnered with other artists for a Gazart initiative based on this concept, which essentially pooled collective resources in the artworld to follow a DIY art-making and exhibition model

⁷⁹ Kabelo Malatsie was appointed VANSAs director in 2018.

⁸⁰ <https://gazart.wordpress.com/>

that promoted independence and self-sufficiency. In a related manifesto, published online, ‘gazat’ was defined as a verb that means “to collectively contribute to a common goal”. *Madeyoulook* and artistic collaborators proposed ‘gazart’ as “a way for everyone to create anything for anyone, creating work, lessening divisions and establishing options” rather than being in competition for resources. Its defined principles were: collaborate, contribute, exchange, ‘copyleft’ (share ideas) and experiment. In these principles, it offers a prime demonstration of artistic thinking.⁸¹

A related observation to these local forms of commoning is the development of self-organised spaces as an artistic response and coping mechanism for adversity. Kodwo Eshun, an artist, academic and member of The Otolith Group, participated in a 2015 London conference by Common Practice, which advocates for the small-scale visual arts sector. In a resulting publication, Eshun insightfully summed up the value of small-scale arts organisations – it was not a matter of size but rather of ‘nested capacity’, of ‘platforming’ or ‘plotforming’ (holding durational conversations that form plots which solidify over time while simultaneously questioning themselves) (quoted by Cruz, 2016: 10-11). My research suggests this understanding of nested capacity/ platforming/ plotforming as a key value of artist-led hubs, or artistic thinking. It sums up the collective and collaborative solutions the artists devised.

Mbongeni Buthelezi was another artist who, like Froud, ‘platforms’ – he created a collective enterprise in the wake of August House to help other artists. In his new Maboneng studio, even larger than his August House space, he launched *MB Studios*. As we heard, this included a networking association to engage elite business and emerging artists. Buthelezi said of this initiative: “This is where my contribution is needed; this is where my effort has to go ... What I have experienced over the years needs to be ploughed back” (personal interview, 2014). Later, he also entered into agreement with a property management company to curate exhibitions at a Pretoria gallery. This was a way to assist artists and to help activate the Pretoria inner city, tagged City Central, in a smaller version of the Maboneng development. This move had other nested implications. The same company – City Property – became Buthelezi’s new landlord when he relocated yet again a few months later. He moved to Selby where he took over a whole warehouse in a light-industrial complex.

⁸¹ <https://gazart.wordpress.com/>

Buthelezi also talked about the desire to change his standing to a property owner rather than a renter to arrest the cycle of relocations. “I’ve discovered that I invest a lot of time in a space, eventually it becomes part of my life, and if that relationship breaks it becomes very painful.”

Daniel Stompie Selibe, like the other tracked artists, also joined a more cohesive studio hub after August House disbanded. This building on Laub Street in Selby soon attracted more artistic tenants. During the research period, the Laub Street artists initiated an open studios event for the public. The relocation solved a problem that Selibe found with August House – it lacked a consistent conversation and was too self-referential.

Yet another arts hub that included August House diaspora was established in the adjacent area of New Doornfontein – Ellis House. This building was also a former textiles factory (Bentex), like August House. An art transport company, Fine Art Logistics, moved to Ellis House, from August House, some time before the building’s sale – primarily for more space. Other tenants later followed, including artist Dorothee Kreutzfeldt. A gallery opened on the ground floor of Ellis House, called ROOM, modelled on non-commercial lines. Kreutzfeldt hosted a solo exhibition there in 2016, called *Here We*, which included artistic content from a one-night goodbye event she co-curated at August House, as already detailed. The Ellis House hub incorporated a residency space and an independent project space opened in 2017, Dead Bunny Society. An ecosystem grew organically in Ellis House and created the same nested capacity of its predecessor.

Not to be outdone by its vacating artists, the August House building transfigured into a new artistic hub with a more collective identity – another example of Eshun’s ‘plotforming’. Its new owner decided to keep it functioning as an atelier and brought back a new cohort of artists, with one or two names from the departed collective returning. New rentals were higher; if artists could not pay, artworks were sometimes accepted in lieu of rent. For better or worse, the building now operated with a more collective identity. Its new owners developed a website for August House and engaged a publicity team. It began to appear more regularly in mainstream media articles, and hosted studio open days for the public. The second-floor studio was transfigured into a co-operative working space where a kind of common aesthetic

emerged, according to one tenant. An internal gallery space was later opened, in a nod to the building's former life when the Seippel Gallery operated from Buthelezi's floor. These changes were met with some ambivalence since August House had always been characterised by its maverick and independent spirit but it was also generally appreciated that the buyer kept the building functioning as an artistic space. It was nonetheless hard work to manage: Mayers said August House represented only 5% of the value of his property portfolio but took up 40% of his time. He was adamant, speaking in 2016, that the building would remain as an atelier in the foreseeable future. "We have zero ambition or desire to turn August House into anything other than what it was. It would be a travesty to displace the artists. We are letting it continue, to keep going" (personal interview, 2016).

As recounted in Chapter 4, Mayers also entered into a strategic relationship with Propertuity, the developers of nearby Maboneng, a move that could also be viewed as a 'platform'. A related aside, about a year after August House changed hands, RMB Holdings (RMH) bought a third of Propertuity in June 2016 and said it may eventually list a separate property fund. It made the transaction because it wanted an unlisted player in property in order to chase net asset value growth rather than income. Propertuity had expanded from one building valued at R15 million to a portfolio worth over R1 billion by mid-2016 (Anderson, 2016: 1).⁸²

Badge Creations, as the building next door to August House was dubbed, also underwent a 'platforming' shift. This so-called bad building got renovated and transformed into low-cost residential space shortly after August House changed hands. A property developer unrelated to the August House transaction bought this neighbouring building soon afterwards, and changed its fate. This helped solve an intransigent problem of increased violence in the immediate neighbourhood.

The spatial transfiguration of Badge Creations reflected a broader truth: the neighbourhood of Doornfontein had always been a site of intense change, from the very beginnings of Johannesburg itself. End Street was the marker of the city's first boundary. This 'afvalgrond' became the triangle upon which the city of Johannesburg

⁸² This expansion was excessively geared among other problems and in October 2018, Propertuity filed for liquidation. In April 2019, 18 of Propertuity's mixed-use buildings in Maboneng were auctioned off including the iconic Arts on Main where Froud's *Cone Virus* was installed. RMH declared in 2018 a R308m full impairment for its investment in Propertuity.

developed from 1886. This fact offered a grounding for other kinds of transfigurations the research tracked.



Fig. 70: Badge Creations (2013).



Fig. 71: Badge Creations (2016).

A different kind of ‘plotforming’ was evident in the Scheryn Art Collection case study. Whereas the August House research demonstrated self-organised spaces as a collaborative response to the uncertainty of disruption, Scheryn indicated the benefits of more formal collective structuring (5.8.). Scheryn demonstrated nested capacity firstly by its very nature as a curated assemblage of artworks. An art collection is built upon the basic idea that there is more meaning to be had from the way works create a dialogue than from holding the same works individually. One of Scheryn’s art advisors, Amanda Botha, has explained how works should also be acquired for their contextual interrelationships as they hold more value this way. That was the founding principle behind the collection’s tree structure where branches intertwined. The collection’s ethos reflected this aspiration. It was intended as “a gathering point for collectors to combine their collections in order to create a more meaningful conversation than they could have individually”.⁸³

Arthur Danto, who has written extensively about the nature of art, touched on this characteristic. Works of art, he wrote, have latencies that become actual when released by other, later works of art; and art itself has a corresponding openness that he described as “dilating substance”. In a book about the difference between art and artefact, he wrote: “Not simply value but structure and meaning shift and turn in the

⁸³ www.scheryn.com

retroactive perspectives opened by succeeding movements of artistic creation ... The population of artworks is a mutually self-enriching system of objects, any given member of which is considerably richer because of the existence of other artworks than it would have been if it alone existed” (Danto, 1988: 18).

Scheryn secondly exhibited nested capacity in its underlying technical structure. As explained in Chapter 5, this took the form of a collective investment vehicle where members pool financial and artistic resources to draw communal benefit. This collective fractal ownership brings various advantages to its members, starting with benefits of scale. The underlying idea of fractal ownership connects to Froud’s Stokvel Gallery; it has a very different aim but was also built upon a collective, invitation-only shared membership. The fractal structure also has an interesting connection conceptually with Froud’s *Cone Virus* fractal forms.

Scheryn thirdly exhibited nested capacity through a related initiative the management team embarked upon during the research period. The team pitched to participate in a Cape Town-based project related to an international art fair, for possible manifestation in 2018. At time of writing, this initiative was still under discussion so the details are anonymised. But the point remains that this move involved co-operation or ‘plotforming’ with local and international partners that would position Scheryn in a larger global city network.

Fourthly, its primary acquisition channel of galleries constituted a structured approach to help mitigate risk. The role of galleries as a formal structuring mechanism for the collection has already been addressed but they can also offer nested capacity to artists. Aspire’s Emma Bedford underscored this aspect; when asked about key factors in an artist’s trajectory, she unhesitatingly replied: “Representation” (personal interview, 2017). “So many good artists just don’t make it because the artists can’t make it alone.” She added that collectors also loved to meet artists but did not want to engage them directly for transactions and preferred an intermediary.

Finally, nested capacity was evident in Scheryn’s remit to acquire global African contemporary art from the continent and its diaspora. Glissant, whose work influenced how I perceived related strategies of resistance and re-imagination, said Africa had the fundamental vocation of diaspora and linked this to a compelling idea of multiplicity (Diawara, 2011: 13). He told his interviewer that every diaspora, or

departure, was the passage from unity to multiplicity, “when one consents not to be a single being and attempts to be many beings at the same time”. Glissant called this multiplicity the true return, and went further: “Let us not forget that Africa has been the source of all kinds of diasporas – not only the forced diaspora imposed by the West through the slave trade.” Glissant said this observation needed thinking about to understand what to do as participants in this diaspora, to help the world realise its true self – of multiplicity (Diawara, 2011: 5).

These observations regarding how the studio and the collection approached sustainability, through self-organised and formal processes of collectivity respectively, had a number of implications. Firstly, the problems that August House faced when its artists had to move were not singular at all; these challenges are shared by comparable spaces in other global cities of flux. That much was evident in a recent London report on artists’ workspaces, which found studios at risk owing to changes in planning and rising property values (‘Artists’ Workspace Study ...’, 2014). In addition, it found smaller operators outside of formal arrangements were precariously situated. Only 17% of artists in the survey had freehold arrangements (that is, they owned the property); the majority were renters (45%) and leaseholders (32%). But a highly novel response to this situation by Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, offered a way forward for this research study too. Khan announced in October 2016 a collaborative initiative to set up a trust fund to support artists’ spaces – the Creative Land Trust. Behind this initiative was a group called Studiometers, who provide entrepreneurial solutions for the creation of artist studios by partnering with different organisations in the property sector. Studiometers was in turn led by Outset Contemporary Art Fund, initiated in 2003 to pool donations in support of new art and the creative ecosystem. The fund’s interests span education, professional development, the production of new work and exhibitions, institutional collecting, and initiatives that underpin the creative infrastructure for the long term.⁸⁴

My research suggests this kind of structural innovation could help artists in the comparable position of the August House diaspora to secure their workspaces. If the financial capital of the collector were to invest directly in the artistic capital of the imagination’s chamber, it could help secure the productive base for both. This could

⁸⁴ www.outset.org.uk

happen for instance through the stated intention of Scheryn to launch a foundation. To some indirect extent this investment already happens, given that artists benefit from gallery sales when Scheryn acquires their work. Scheryn also contributed a significant endowment to Zeitz MOCAA, another way its management company is investing indirectly in the future of contemporary African artists albeit there is some self-interest. To help shift power relations rather than reinscribe them, and to enable structural change, there is scope for more targeted intervention and reconsiderations – as 6.2. sets out below.

Likewise, artists can innovate with other individuals and collectives for their own structural needs. This would also take an acknowledgement of how they are implicated wittingly or unwittingly in nested dynamics. By way of example: during the research period, Gordon Froud co-curated an exhibition in July 2014 of 500 artworks expressing the first 20 years of democracy in South Africa, titled *Twenty*, exhibited at the Appalachian State University in the United States. August House contemporaries in the exhibition included the other tracked artists in this study – Buthelezi, Selibe and McInnes. A smaller curated version of the same exhibition showed at University of Johannesburg gallery, in July 2016. It then travelled to the 6th Beijing Biennale, in September 2016. That Beijing version of the exhibition was sponsored by Shanghai Zendai, a Chinese development company headed up by a private art collector. The group is best known in South Africa as its offshoot, Zendai Development SA, that is spearheading a new R84 billion smart city development in Modderfontein. Over the next 20 years, this development will convert 1,600 hectares into a mini-city including residential accommodation, educational institutes, a trade and logistics park, and light industry. It is one of five new multi-billion rand cities being built in Gauteng, effectively gated estates with their own amenities and public services that exacerbate spatial inequality vectors already outlined in Chapter 4.

The comparison with London workspaces, above, also points to a future research agenda to similarly map local artist workspaces and survey their operating models. This could help find original ways to support artistic practice and increase resilience. A model akin to the Creative Land Trust for instance could help bring the more structured approach of the artworld to the self-organised strategies of artists, for their mutual benefit. By way of explicit example, the Creative Land Trust intends to enable faster financing for studio providers looking to buy their buildings, and will be able to

hold property for use as permanent affordable workspace for artists (City of London, 2016). The latter would be sourced from a central loan fund to acquire workspace, according to the press statement, and the trust would also look to protect buildings in perpetuity for use as affordable workspace. This solution is a combination of public funds, philanthropy and social impact investment. The City of London claimed in the same press statement that the booming residential market and liberalisation of planning regulations had resulted in hundreds of artists being forced from their workspaces and many out of the city (City of London, 2016). The Creative Land Trust was a response, and similar models existed in other cities, it added. These include San Francisco, where the Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST) helped build the capacity of arts organisations to acquire affordable properties, offer access to funding, or affordable rents. Justine Simons, the deputy Mayor for Culture and Creative Industries in the UK, remarked in the same media statement: “Artists and creative people are like the advance party – they find unusual places that no one sees much value in and they breathe life into them. We can’t underestimate the value they bring to the capital’s character, identity and success. The trick is to find a way to allow them to put down roots in areas they have played such an important role in establishing – and not get displaced as prices rise” (City of London, 2016).

Another example of such crossover is the Art for Justice Fund.⁸⁵ This fund was set up in 2017 by an art collector in the United States, Agnes Gund. She sold artwork in her collection to raise seed capital for this fund, and has invited other collectors to join. Specifically, Gund sold a Roy Lichtenstein work reportedly for \$165 million including fees, and donated \$100 million to start the fund. The fund aims to achieve reforms in the justice system over a period of five years. In addition to advocating for legal change, the Art for Justice Fund will also support artistic initiatives to engage with related issues. The fund is managed by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, a nonprofit organisation.

A local example of a much smaller-scaled initiative is the Brush Care Fund, set up in early 2016 as a support fund by artists and for artists, born from “empathy and compassion, run purely on goodwill”. Another instructive example closer to home also bridges art collecting and artistic practice – the recently formed nonprofit A4 Arts Foundation. This initiative is founded by an American patron, Wendy Fisher, and

⁸⁵ <http://artforjusticefund.org/>

directed by Atlantic House artist Josh Ginsburg, who described A4 as “a private space and a territory where things could happen”. Ginsburg in this capacity is helping A4 build a collection of South African contemporary art, which could also be engaged for public education purposes. In 2017, the A4 Arts Foundation opened a physical space in Cape Town CBD. Its organisers said the space would function as a gallery, facilitated research space, archive, library and practitioner centre. Ginsburg told a public panel ‘Making Space’ at Greatmore studios in Woodstock that the A4 initiative was about how artworks could be collected, as well as an entity supporting artistic practice. He suggested this could help break down a radical separation of information between territories, an opacity between the art [practitioner] world and the market. Further, Ginsburg said part of what emerged from building the collections policy was an experimentation with what constituted a ‘collection’, and how related exhibitions would be an opportunity to disrupt that. He said the idea was to make fluid otherwise rigid boundaries and include other forms of production like digital and ephemeral practices. Because galleries could only support the few, it was suggested that radical new ways of making, sustaining and generating work had to be found and artists needed to generate those new models (Ginsburg, 2017).

That is an important final point for the diffraction this chapter aims to accomplish. Creatively rethinking the city means apprehending forms that already exist in the social fabric and elsewhere and applying them in new ways - just as Stokvel Gallery and Gazart did. Learning from these ways of doing can potentially help address structural legacies and reconfigure them, amplifying the kind of logics already evident in self-fashioned solutions rather than imposing a disconnected model. Such innovations pay attention to existing logics, less visible infrastructures and embedded networks and leverage them into strategies for dealing with uncertainty that create emergent forms.

The various innovations cited above are practical examples of how the different approaches behind the two case studies – artistic thinking and structural thinking – could help configure a more resilient artworld ecosystem. This would take ‘plotforming’ to a new level of nested capacity. The very act of linking in such a connective process has power, as Daniel Miller suggests: “Whether in arbitrage or developing coinage or banking, it is thinking how to relate areas together that seems most productive, or even re-thinking what kind of object finance represents ... In general terms then value is most effectively created by its own use as a bridge

between what otherwise would be regarded as distinct regimes of value” (Miller, 2011: 12-13).

Chapters 4 and 5 dealt with different responses to uncertainty – the artists transfigured workspaces into collaborative self-organised initiatives; the collectors created formal structures. Collectivity was common to both, they just had different ways of achieving it. However, such cross-pollinating agencies, or Callon’s (2005:4) hybrid collectives of *agencements*, do not alter the structure of the artworld ecosystem. This is because, as Bourdieu pointed out, the dominant class in capitalist society is the beneficiary of power, which in turn is embodied in economic and cultural capital and imbricated through society’s institutions and practices which also reproduce it (Lechte, 1994: 45). For a deeper intervention, a change in power relations is required. The next two sections specifically deal with this aspect of structural change through a recent example, before concluding the chapter.

6.2. Deriving value: the right to follow

The second key concept flagged at the start of this thesis was mobility, understood as a kind of nomadic performativity the artwork displayed as it travelled along different kinds of pathways. This section links the concept of mobility to ‘*the right to follow*’ – an understanding that extends the methodological implications of following the things themselves into systemic issues.

To recap on mobility then: the August House case study showed how artworks were constantly on the move, in a physical sense – from the insular studio environment, they entered the broader world via collections, exhibitions and public space installations. They were also on the move through transference of ideas. The tracked artworks highlighted different kinds of mobilities in turn: transformation (Buthelezi’s *Nobuhle, Beauty Queen* portraits), improvisation (Selibe’s *Miles Rehearsal* performance), migrancy and other displacements (McInnes’s *Wife’s Lot* sculpture), and the fractal (Froud’s *Cone Virus* installations). The artwork meanings were multivalent and lent themselves to different interpretations, emphasising the processual nature of the artwork. The artists, meanwhile, all relocated to self-organised artistic hubs. The August House building, under new management, started a second life too, as an atelier with a different cohort of tenants and management ethos. Scheryn, on the other hand, expanded notions of mobility into implied spaces and thus

suggested the potential of the artwork to be a repository of indexical value. In these cycles of neverendings, the artwork took on Buren's eternal nomadism (2012: 90), which in turn lends itself to derivate forms of future value.

This relates to the issue of structural change, which came to the South African artworld during the research period in an interesting new way. An auction house launched, Aspire Art Auctions, which focuses upon modernist and contemporary South African fine art. Aspire received attention partly for a new approach to curated auctions but primarily because it introduced to the country an innovation from Europe: the 'right to follow' (*droit de suite*). When an artwork sells via auction, the artist does not reap a direct financial dividend. Only the intermediaries benefit. The artists have created added value but do not share in its gains, much like the situation with the August House revaluation. Indirectly, artists benefit from a potential new benchmark price for their work, if it sold at a higher figure than expected, and their reputation could benefit from related publicity. By the same token, if a piece failed to sell, it would be considered "burnt" in auction-world terminology. (This structural reality also plays out in the primary market. Commercial galleries, as the other major acquisition channel, take about 40% commission and the artist is not remunerated on future onward sales. Further, for a solo exhibition, the accepted practice in the South African artworld is that artists pay for gallery rental and some associated costs. This puts them in a financially vulnerable position should their work fail to sell, and loads further risk in addition to implicit creative risk.) The right to follow is an attempt to remedy this situation. It rewards the artist who created the work in the first place – it functions like a royalty, which is common practice in the music and literary worlds.⁸⁶ A percentage of the price for artwork sold on the secondary market goes to the artist, capped at a certain level, in a system which recognises the artwork's mobility by rewarding artists into the future.

In Europe, this payment also applies to the artist's estate if the artist were deceased. The right to follow was first instituted in France after the poverty-stricken family of a deceased artist (Jean-François Millet) did not benefit from the sale in 1889 of a highly valued artwork. This brought about a change in the law, and other European countries

⁸⁶ Incidentally, in the financial world, independent financial advisors earn something comparable when they recommend a financial product such as an open-ended investment fund: they often receive an ongoing 'trail commission' in addition to an initial fee.

followed. The right to follow is part of the Berne Convention and protects the copyright on literary and art works. South Africa's Aspire followed the European sliding scale model: works of up to R50,000 in value qualified for 4% and works above R500,000 for 0.25%. There is no local legislation in South Africa to enforce this trail payment; it is currently voluntary. There is also some dispute about whether the buyer or the seller should pay this fee but in the meantime Aspire has taken responsibility for covering it.

It is generally accepted that authors of creative work have the right to benefit from their own intellectual capital – the principle of the right to follow. This observation is particularly fitting in this research study given its methodology of attentively following artworks, and conceptually extends the idea in a new direction. Since the artwork is essentially nomadic, the right to follow holds that its onward journeys could generate trail payments back to the artist. Scheryn was not an active buyer at auction since it favoured galleries but its management took heed of auction prices for comparative purposes. It is the principle behind the right to follow that is most pertinent here. The right to follow also demonstrates the entanglements an artwork represents, how its maker is still indexed even when the context in which the artwork circulates has utterly changed. The world of the studio and the collection are indeed imbricated.

The possibility for the resale right has been discussed by various players in the local art sector for some time, according to Aspire's Emma Bedford; its inception met some resistance but the level of transactions has not been negatively affected and the hope is towards a wider take-up. Artist Louis Maqhubela, in a statement from Aspire, welcomed the move – according to Bedford, the news came rather ironically just as he was having to vacate his studio. “The South African and African art market are thriving ... It seems the right thing to do – that artists should benefit from the increased value of their work” (Bedford, personal interview, 2017). Artists often graduated from art school producing brilliant work but with unrealistic expectations, she added. “We worry that artists can't sustain themselves.”

Ways to increase artistic yield for producers, or makers, is a key challenge to maintain a sustainable art ecosystem, particularly in light of increased financialisation. This new voluntary payment is one step in that direction although it only applies to the secondary market. The innovation in South Africa currently also only applies to

Aspire's auction transactions but this could expand in future. At time of writing, the Copyright Amendment Act 2017 was making its legislative way through Parliament in South Africa. This draft document states that a resale royalty right applies whether or not the author (of works including artistic works) has entered into an agreement with any person to assign, waive or charge a resale royalty right in contravention of the Act (Copyright Amendment Bill, 2017). The visual art advocacy body of VANSAs welcomed the provision and recommended that more attention was given to its administration and related technicalities regarding rates. It also wanted reciprocity for international sales, and communal rights for some artworks. VANSAs recommended the UK and Australia as functional models (VANSAs, 2017).

The resale rights conversation was also happening elsewhere. In May 2017, a media report by AFP stated that the United Nations World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) was debating a proposal from Senegal and Congo-Brazzaville to push for an agreement guaranteeing the resale right globally. More than 80 countries worldwide currently recognised the resale right, providing visual artists between 1% and 5% of secondary sales proceeds, with a cap of roughly \$15,000. "As artists, we make the value of our artwork increase through continuing to work and expanding our reputations," Canadian artist Grant McConnell told AFP (Larson, 2017).

Although the right to follow is only applicable to the secondary market, the primary market of direct sales offers another way to implement something like it, by creating artist's proofs. These are one or two artworks in an edition which the artist holds back. Artist's proofs are primarily intended to build a personal archive of work. But, somewhat more cynically, they can also hedge against future price increases. If the value of the work rises, the artist can release their proofs and directly benefit from this new valuation. Artist's proofs only apply to editions, which are made in a limited series of reproductions. Such multiples can apply to printmaking, photography and sculpture.

An instructive example of an artist using the underlying logic of the right to follow became apparent during the research period when the famous British musician David Bowie died, in January 2016. His death surfaced interesting facts including the musician's innovation of 'Bowie bonds' in the late 1990s. Through these bonds, Bowie engineered the right to follow as a way to secure his intellectual property rights

and earn an income stream to develop new work. The solution has a similar structure to the right to follow but a different way to achieve it. Basically, Bowie bonds were payments by investors or supporters that were made to Bowie in expectation of future returns. These returns were generally in the form of royalty payments from Bowie's intellectual capital. In the transaction, the musician forfeited royalties on selected work for 10 years and he used the payments to buy back his old recordings. Bowie's albums or back catalogue underlying the bond thus became a form of artistic collateral. The Bowie bonds were purchased at the time by Prudential Insurance for \$55 million (Campbell, 2016). Bowie innovated the bonds to achieve full control of his own intellectual capital – he wanted to own his creative means of production in perpetuity. Towards this end, he gave up a limited period of royalty returns. Other artists like James Brown later followed suit with bonds of their own.

In Chapter 5, the idea of art as collateral was raised. Bowie Bonds were an early example of a celebrity bond. This is a commercial debt security issued by the holder of fame-based intellectual property who receives money upfront in exchange for assigning the right to collect future royalties from the works listed in the bond.⁸⁷ This type of esoteric security suggested the potential for such a transaction to happen in the future fine art world in South Africa. Imagine if, for instance, William Kentridge issued bonds to investors that assigned for a decade the royalty rights from his interdisciplinary opera, a production of Shostakovich's *The Nose*. The money received up front could in turn finance his next art project. This hypothetical example would be using art as collateral, a form of security, albeit to produce more art. This kind of innovation has already been employed in the local contemporary artworld, when the agent for artist Paul Emmanuel in 2007 oversaw a fundraising drive to cover an ambitious travelling installation, *Transitions*, and art film. Businessman and art patron Dick Enthoven pre-financed the proposed new body of work on behalf of a collection, Spier Contemporary, in a deal believed to be worth just under R1 million, and set a precedent in the South African visual arts world (Strauss, 2007: 3).

If financial innovations go wrong, they can have dire consequences. Packaging up mortgage debt into securities turned out very badly for the United States and the rest of the world, which felt the knock-on effects of the US credit crunch in the financial crisis (2007-08) that followed. Much of that debt, bundled into so-called collateral

⁸⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celebrity_bond

debt obligations (CDOs), was worthless but marked as investment grade by the ratings agencies. The tower of such derivatives folded, as so vividly told by Michael Lewis (2010), leaving many people bankrupted and homeless. Turning to art as the next derivative has troubling echoes of the financial mis-selling that underscored the credit crunch in the US housing market. Yet fine art is undoubtedly intertwined with global financial flows, with implications for re-imagination. This dichotomy was brought home in a conversation with friends who would attend every two years a derivatives conference in the United States. Often, they said, the venues for these get-togethers were high-calibre art spaces. At one of these meetings, my friend said, the head of the conference advised everyone in attendance that they were doing ‘the work of God’. I thought of Froud’s studio door: KERK/ CHURCH; STILTE/ SILENCE. Art as a new religion for atheists. The New Church.

On the one hand, the geographies of finance are in constant flux, according to Brett Christophers (2014: 291). He says our social imagination of possible futures is at stake because, following Mann, the future is implicated through credit. Academic and philosopher Achille Mbembe has pointed out something similar, that debt involved the mortgaging of entire nations and comprised a suspension of democracy by market forces: “Recapturing the future means resisting its appropriation ... What is at stake is the expropriation of people’s futures” he told the Johannesburg Workshop on Theory and Criticism (JWTC) (Mbembe, 2013).

Stepping back to afford a different view: seamless travel of fine art into spaces of high finance has another kind of significance. It implies a vital opportunity as well, which stems from its mobility. If art can inhabit and deliver affective impact in these spaces, the knock-on effects could be substantial and could help render structural change. The material realities for the majority are affected by the movement of capital and resources; it follows that the perspectives of people managing these financial flows are important. The opportunity to shift perspective through artistic presence alone – a resonant quality Rolnik (2010) called *entorno* – can have potentially powerful repercussions if the viewer of that work is in the position to affect material realities. There are many caveats to such a re-imagination but the potential for dialogue is clear. This relates back to ideas transference, the capacity of art to be a locus of indexical registrations, and its ability to travel into implied spaces, as conjured earlier. The role of artworks is to learn to inhabit the world in a better way, says Bourriaud,

“no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist” (2002: 13). He adds: “The artist dwells in the circumstances the present offers him, so as to turn the setting of his life (his links with the physical and conceptual world) into a lasting world” (2002: 14). Indeed, we have seen this at play with the collective and co-operative structures fashioned by artists in response to precarity and flux.

This section has set out a recent example of a structural shift taking place in the South African (and broader) artworld as it pertains to the secondary market. It is an instructive example, nonetheless, because it demonstrated a principle – the right to follow, or the right to gain from intellectual property. Underlying the right to follow is the contentious logic of the derivative, which briefly needs to be unpacked as it has implications for the sustainability of the artworld ecosystem. In particular, this increasingly pervasive logic can be subverted to platform an alternative value script, or what Gazart earlier described as ‘copyleft’, which this chapter will unfold.

At its heart, *the derivative* comprises resale rights based on the underlying value of an asset – in this case, intellectual property in an artwork. Those rights are sometimes bundled forward as a futures contract. The latter is what David Bowie accomplished with his bonds and what any broad take-up of artist resale royalties would institutionalise. The derivative is also the financial structuring mechanism upon which art collateral is based, when loans are taken out against artworks. This is also the underlying logic of pure art investment funds, where value is derived from a portfolio of artworks.

The financialisation critique of the derivative is plainly obvious. Art writer Jonathan Neil sums this up as the separation of discourse from price, and the separation of ownership from possession and thus proximity to the singularity that gives ownership meaning (Neil, 2015: 28). Yet although the derivative may be regarded as the undoing of art, Neil proposes it may also present conditions for its formal advancement in the present. He cited an example of a portfolio manager offering art instruments modelled on financial instruments that attempted to do internally what contract-based resale royalties did externally, “to make the derivative a condition of art’s very *possibility*, to install the derivative financial structure as twenty-first-century art’s operating system” (2015: 29, added emphasis). Neil suggested an initiative like Real Flow, which

developed such art instruments under a tagline ‘art is the sublime asset’, in fact wanted to sublime art – not by financialising it but by offering finance art, or finance as a formal resource for art. That is a very important distinction. It also implies an interesting provocation to consider whether finance could be used as another medium, like paint, or another way of working, like performance. Neil wrote: “If the readymade was nothing but the commodity form offered in the place of art, then Real Flow’s instruments are nothing but the finance form offered as art” (2015: 29).

This thesis in fact started with the idea of the readymade – Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Box* – and in this circularity now poses a crucial provocation: if the most probable dominant modality of art production for the 21st century is indeed the derivative structure, what possibilities exist for art to internalise that structure within its form towards its own subversive ends? Otherwise put: can artists leverage the structures that would leverage art, and if so how? Reflexive criticality has always been a part of contemporary art production and there is no reason to suspect it will stop anytime soon.

First of all, to reverse slightly, to what extent is contemporary art production taking a derivative form or increasingly likely to do so? McKenzie Wark (2016) views the artwork as primarily functioning as a derivative in the sense of a portfolio of simulation values: dematerialisation of the artwork and its ubiquity can be a kind of “distributed provenance” of which the artwork itself is the derivative. This played out in Chapter 5 when the key concept of mobility was extended into implied spaces. Wark writes: “The artwork is then ideally a portfolio of different kinds of simulated value, the mixture of which can be a long-term hedge against the risks of various kinds of simulated value falling – such as the revealing of the name of a hidden artist, or the decline of the intellectual discourse on which the work depended, or the artist falling into banality and overproduction” (Wark, 2016). This idea of the artwork as a locus of indexical value was described in Chapter 5 by demonstrating the kinds of indexical registrations artworks could accrue over time. These included exhibitions, awards, art fairs, acquisitions or sales, critical coverage, social media presence and other related indicators. The artwork itself became a residual collation of such indexations, of actions, of performances of value, connecting one work to another and each work to a system. The artwork’s life was also lived ‘out there’ through proxies.

Arjun Appadurai (2013) spoke about the pervasive form of the derivative more generally, in a presentation to JWTC, which focused upon the effects of different forms on culture and their claim to reality. He linked derivatives to the performativity of markets, which are constantly dynamically produced, with risk and uncertainty as integral market properties. Appadurai said capitalism surrounded us in a way it had not before, including new financial instruments that monetised risk. The core logic of the derivative was effectively bets on the future, he said. “We are all labourers now regardless of what we do at work because [a] primary reason for being is to enter into debt” (Appadurai, 2013).

This spread of the capitalist imaginary was increasingly part of the global South, Appadurai said. Debt refusal was one path of political resistance but he suggested a different view of financial capitalism, which did not see the derivative logic as “inherently inequitable or evil”. Instead, the challenge was how to expose and control such practices and transform the situation, “to appropriate the means of production of debt in the interests of a vast class of debt producers rather than a small class of debt manipulators” (Appadurai, 2013). Debt as such was not bad because it allowed us to *bring future value into the present*, he said (added emphasis). The challenge was to socialise and democratise the profit produced by the monetisation of debt – to become beneficiaries and not just producers of this dynamic. Performative forms that changed the world by the force of their utterance, Appadurai said, involved a rethinking of ritual – as an exercise in enacting uncertainty that increased the likelihood of resolving it. Markets were made, constantly produced, through contracted agreements and this was a form of ritual, he added. This idea of the performative is rooted in Austin’s concept of words that not only say something but do something, challenging ideas around value and cutting to the core of this research inquiry.

To bring this section on deriving value to a close, then, the potential of commoning was earlier described as not always being subjugated to practices of capital accumulation but also as productive moments of resistance, creating “new vocabularies, solidarities, social and spatial practices and relations and repertoires” (Chatterton, 2010: 626). This productive tension is differently articulated by Haiven, who writes about a new breed of collectors who are also beneficiaries and functionaries of the massive growth of the global financial apparatus (Haiven, 2015: 44). More intriguingly, Haiven finds surprising correspondence between the world of

contemporary art and money since the latter is also primarily about navigating an immaterial world of relationships, probabilities, conjectures, and opportunities; and that financial markets are also spheres of representations where real-world wealth is translated into abstractions of derivative contracts. “Like a financial asset, contemporary, critical art gains its legitimacy and value as a gesture within a field of other similar gestures, and in ways that, ultimately, rely not on an objective criteria but on their capacity to achieve (at least temporary) credibility and believability within a specific symbolic and material economy” (Haiven, 2015: 44).

In a sense, art now exists in an “epidemic of value”, according to Jean Baudrillard (1990), who described such dispersal of value that it becomes hard to really speak of value at all because valuation became impossible. This stage of value he called fractal, like Froud’s *Cone Virus*, and compared this to a floating currency that could not be exchanged or converted. Its only reference was itself – there being no gold standard. Art was in fact an “alternative currency”, proposed Hito Steyerl. It fulfilled what the cryptocurrencies Ethereum and Bitcoin only promised: “In times in which financial institutions and even whole political entities may just dissolve into fluffy glitter, investment in art seems somehow more real” (Steyerl, 2016: 1). Rather than money issued by a nation and administered by central banks, art was a networked, decentralised, widespread system of value, Steyerl suggested. The value was not in the product but in the network, in creating exchange (Steyerl, 2016: 6). With no central institution to guarantee value, just as cryptocurrencies use blockchain technology instead to record and aggregate transactions, there was “a jumble of sponsors, censors, bloggers, developers, producers, hipsters, handlers, patrons, privateers, collectors, and way more confusing characters. Value arises from gossip-cum-spin and insider information”. This insight further informed the finding of art as a vector of value – value not in the artwork itself but in what it surfaces as it migrates in a larger network of exchanges. Steyerl called this informal ecology “eminently hackable” but any kind of progressive transformation could only occur through conscious effort and exchange among diverse entities (2016: 5). This transformation would have to build on current weak links, “reshaping them ... within a mess of contradictory activities”. She proposed an *art-related undercommons* in response, building partial networked autonomy via all means necessary (2016: 6, added emphasis). Although it was usually artists who subsidised art production, through concocting mixed-income schemes with some form of waged labour to fund

artmaking, everyone involved contributed to art's circulation thus making it stronger as a currency (Steyerl, 2016: 5-6).

My final set of observations and corresponding ideas, which follow, comprise my own theoretical hack on this informal ecology. This hack aims to contribute towards an art-related undercommons – where the work gets done, and subverted (Harney & Moten, 2013: 26), and to do so deploys the third and final key concept of the web.

6.3. Contemporary art as a public good

This research has made clear the structural realities that make art possible or impossible to produce within the first frame of the studio, and the need for a more sustainable artworld ecosystem. These structural realities go on to affect how art moves (or fails to move) into the world at large, through the switching points of intermediaries, affecting its level of in/visibility. The circuits of capital that shape this reality are important to reflect upon; related, artists deserve to be well remunerated for the value and meaning they create and to make a less precarious living. However, given that contemporary artworks require an autonomy for their vital critical capacity, the deeper and related challenge is how to think about what cannot be priced and articulate value in a way that does not default to the pervasive nature of economic and financial validations. “To be sure, we can buy art, but we sense that if it is mere commodity, we pay too much; and if it is true art, we pay infinitely too little ... we suffer a poverty of immeasurable things, priceless things; a poverty of the things that money cannot buy and a surfeit of the things it can” (Eisenstein, 2011: 40). As Chapter 1 clarified, the research aimed to offer new means to (re)value artistic practice with alternative models, or at least an alternative value script. The third concept of the web (1.5.) related in particular to the idea of the artworld as an ecosystem and thus the heuristic of ecosystem services was engaged. This section expands upon this transposition, from the natural sciences to the artworld. It positions contemporary art as part of a commons, a public good whose central characteristic is public interest from which other kinds of valuations may flow. This transposition recognises the importance of financial validation, or the right to follow, but views this as a corollary of the artwork's deeper public value rather than defining it.

The trope of ecosystem services and its technical detail in Chapter 1 informed earlier work (Gurney, 2015) that made a transfiguration of the ecosystem services model for the artworld and propositions around an art of the commons. In this section, I populate this earlier thought experiment with the two case studies of the studio and the collection as concrete examples. The key point to highlight in this transposition is that ecosystems are viewed in the natural sciences model as a capital fund capable of yielding a stream of ecosystem services termed benefits (Lant, Ruhl & Kraft, 2008), as depicted in the Cascade model (Fig. 12). The fund (natural capital) yields a flow of ecosystem services over time (natural income). This is similar to the way a fund of financial capital can yield a flow of interest or income (Lant, Ruhl & Kraft, 2008: 969). Applying this schematic to the artworld ecosystem, the capital fund comprises the artwork (cultural capital); and the stream of benefits – natural income or interest – becomes cultural income or interest. Importantly, the latter stream of benefits is conceived as a form of *public interest* rather than pecuniary benefits. The transfiguration thus offers a theoretical hack to ascribe value beyond price.

The specific case studies of the studio (atelier) and the collection offer a way to populate this theoretical transfiguration with empirical data and generate a key finding. Specifically: the Scheryn collection was financed by a fund structured as a private trust, which thus offers itself in this model as the capital fund. This fund comprised a portfolio of artworks (earlier termed ‘running a book’) that constituted the collection – hence, cultural capital. The return the portfolio delivered to its members, however perceived, comprises the stream of interest. In this transposed Cascade model, the benefits stream is cultural interest, understood as a form of public interest. Likewise, the atelier of August House has cultural capital in the artworks produced in its midst; in a similar transfiguration, they deliver a stream of public interest.

This transposition is schematically represented below (Fig. 72) in my adaptation of the ecosystem services Cascade model, for the artworld. Whereas the original model for the natural sciences (Fig. 12) used the example of the woodland as a natural commons, my adaptation uses the example of Froud’s Stokvel Gallery as an art of the commons. The diagram is fairly self-explanatory; what is most notable, however, is the ordering of the cascade. The service and benefit *precede* the value. This has deep

significance and generates the second key finding of the thesis: that contemporary art is a public good from which other valuations flow.

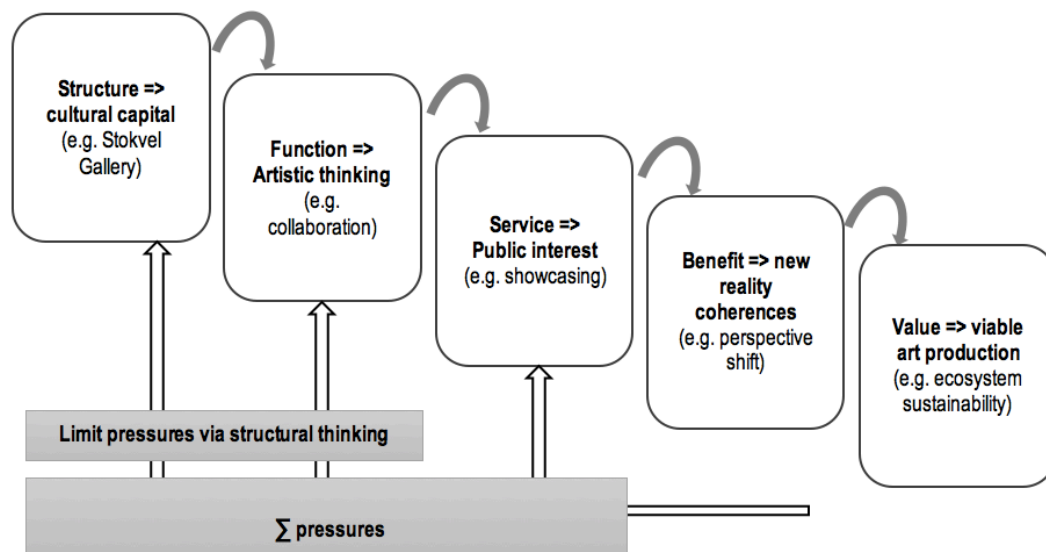


Fig. 72: Artworld Cascade model. Source: Author, adapted after: Haines-Young & Potschin (2010).

Financial return is only one kind of return – significant, because of the realities inscribed by circuits of capital and financial flows, and as a validating mechanism for the right to follow that respects intellectual property and artistic innovation. But just as vital, if not more so given artwork’s imbrication with public interest, is to propose other notions of value that are beyond quantitative measure as the artwork’s foundational significance. This articulation is getting increasingly tricky as public policy cleaves to the creative economies discourse. As indicated in Chapter 1, that discourse privileges an economic validation of the arts and its instrumentalisation. In an era of heightened financialisation, alternative articulations of value are therefore both necessary and timely.

Related, if contemporary art is fundamentally a public good, there is responsibility for the state to support it. But the public purse, particularly in a country like South Africa with its competing priorities, is under strain and the reality internationally is austerity environments and arts funding cuts. The US government, for instance, stated an intention in early 2017 to eliminate the art and humanities agencies and defund the nonprofit public broadcasting corporation as part of wider federal budget cuts. This brake on nonprofit institutional and state support creates an opportunity and a need for

public-private partnerships to fill the gap. Zeitz MOCAA is just one recent example of this crossover. Scheryn is potentially another provided it goes on to vigorously fulfil its public mandate as intended.

In the transposition offered above, contemporary art is a public good that often travels along private pathways. Private collectors in this hybrid reality thus become custodians of a cultural commons. The private collectors of art tracked in this research project were very aware of this custodianship and were also largely moved by art's intangible qualities. Art can shift your perspective because it exposes you to things you did not think about, said Steyn. For him, collecting art seemed mostly about curiosity, and looking, and how the artworks offered a different way of seeing the world. Price to Scheryn collectors was more about paying fair value for a work with the kind of artistic qualities that could hold its own into the future. Discussing a photographer's work for potential acquisition at a Scheryn meeting, he said: "I've looked at a lot of photos. The more I look, the more I want to look. I can look at this picture for a very long time" (key meetings, 2016).

Steyn's earlier anecdote about visiting the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Richard Serra exhibition also reflected this curiosity and his cited recollection of that installation is significant. It relates back to earlier discussion about the potential of art to have an affective impact by travelling into spaces where it can reach people of consequence whose decisions may have a ripple effect. Viljoen also touched on this capacity when he outlined his motivations for collecting art, in part addressing insufficient institutional resources. "I think the artworld has important things to say and important points of view to bring across and interesting ways of doing it. And I'd like to provide the public with access to that." Viljoen believed artwork should have integrity but that it struggled to be an agent of change: "I think art is better at reflecting change and also possibly triggering thinking about the status quo."

I had my own affective experience during the research period while watching *I Love You When You're Breathing*, by the Handspring Puppet Company, at a workshop demonstration in November 2016. The stringed puppet told the audience that its existence was not only about what its three manipulators did; you also judged their performance by what they refrained from doing. This triggered thought about absences and gaps, the invisible and the subtext, the so-called ghostings in this

research, and how actions and silences all conferred meaning. Choices delineate ethics and thus being human; artworks have the capacity to help reflect upon this. Contemporary art offers much more than an affective experience, though. It is made quite consciously as part of a broader historical context; it is conceptual and self-reflexive in relation to an established canon and discourse so it also offers a productive seam to trouble established ideas around knowledge production. “It is generally assumed that all artworks have conceptual elements, and therefore rely on chains of explanation that either supervene upon or have equal status to the work itself” (Fulton, 2017).

This intertextuality offers other fields and disciplines a generative way of seeing the world, or wishful thinking as evoked at the chapter’s start. What this means is that contemporary art can offer new structures for apprehending reality while the structures in which art moves can offer mechanisms, even new mediums, for artworld resilience. This brings the analysis to the final Conclusion, a summary of the research findings and epistemic contribution.

Chapter 7: Conclusion



Figs. 73 & 74: A house-build in Dunoon, a post-apartheid township in Cape Town, featuring an upgrade over an existing government-issued ‘matchbox’ structure (2013).

This research was conducted at a time when African contemporary art was being more intensively incorporated into a global system together with its increased financialisation. Simultaneously, constrained institutional artworld support was combined with a pervasive instrumentalisation of the arts sector in public policy towards economic ends. Given a socio-economic context of competing priorities and pressing everyday needs, the related challenge was how to fathom and articulate an alternative conception of artistic value that offers a riposte, helps strengthen the critical capacity of artists, and contributes to the sustainability of an artworld ecosystem.

There are practices and processes underway in what is arguably the largest contemporary artworld on the African continent, South Africa, which can speak back to these realities and other comparable conditions of flux. They do so from a context that is emblematic in many ways of global conditions, in particular an acute uncertainty and inequality that exaggerates the underlying dynamics of production and consumption. Almost 20 years ago, Alan Mabin wrote about the urban world through a South African prism, stating that “cities of South Africa show potential futures and not only possible pasts of the cities of the North” (1999: 151); and, more recently, that artists were key to evoking these ‘heres’ and ‘elsewheres’. To this end,

the thesis engages two original case studies caught at unique moments in time: a Johannesburg atelier on the cusp of closing down, and a Cape Town private art collection as it is starting up, underscored by the continent's first art fund of its kind. These case studies from the global South delve into different ideas about value and valuation respectively. More simply put, the research investigated how contemporary art became matter in the studio and how it came to matter in the broader artworld.

It did so by following the things themselves (Appadurai, 1986), tracking artworks in their journeys from the studio into the larger artworld and public domain. This orientation is in itself significant: the research makes its contribution by starting in the so-called imagination's chamber – the first frame of production – to take the inquiry back to first principles as it were and let the artwork lead the way. This ordering differs from an emphasis in comparable studies that generally starts at the reified end. It makes possible a different set of findings that privilege practice and process as centres of conceptual gravity affecting the artwork's onward journey, and enable more nuanced readings to inform broader debates. Unravelling the threads of those artwork journeys also offers a different reading on urban flux and future forms; this is because artworks were found to be deeply imbricated in the socio-economic fabric and indexical of its broader processes. This method of attentive following of artworks and where they lead also speaks to a performative theory of value in an expanded new materialism, understanding artworks as vectors in the making of meaning.

Key catalytic nodes in these artwork journeys were revaluation events in response to disruptions. These revaluations, following a buy-out and buy-in respectively, made latent linkages between space and imagination more evident, and emphasised the role of intermediaries. Responses to uncertainty, which stressed different kinds of collectivity, were key to findings. Firstly, contemporary art is a vector of value that performs meaning as it moves. Value is thus contingent upon the artwork's nomadism into implied spaces, as Chapter 5 describes. This nomadism collapses a Cartesian grid of x-y co-ordinates and reinforces instead the idea of a web of transversal interrelations that defies linearity. Secondly, public interest is a central characteristic from which other valuations flow. A trio of key concepts and corresponding ideas facilitates these findings: uncertainty necessitates nested capacity; mobility enables derivative value or the right to follow; and the web of the commons underscores contemporary art as a public good.

The thesis offers its own value transfiguration by applying an ecological framework in the synthesis of empirical data to re(value) contemporary art as part of a commons. This process combined Barad's three tiers of investigation towards an expansive theory of new materialism: micro (the quotidian of August House), macro (the intermediaries of Scheryn) and meso (the ecological thinking of the commons). Such an experiment is "a material reckoning of the perils and obstacles, the inertia and flows, the systemic logics and granular details" (Coole, 2013: 463). Specifically, the thesis makes an original contribution to debates on value and valuation in the contemporary artworld by emphasising in its findings two key attributes from the respective case studies and bringing them into correspondence: artistic thinking (intrinsic value) and structural thinking (extrinsic valuation). These different modalities are linked by an emphasis on collectivity, or nested capacity, but have different ways of apprehending it. Self-organised solutions like Stokvel Gallery are emblematic of artistic thinking while formal strategies like fractal ownership are emblematic of structural thinking. Both are local examples of commoning, which take context as cue in building fractal solutions that can be scaled up or down accordingly.

The research question asked: what is the measure (value) of contemporary art? It finds that contemporary art is itself a vector of value. It has quantity and direction but is also a carrier of embodied meaning, performed or enacted into spaces both real and implied. The research corollary asked what contemporary art in turn takes the measure of; it offers, in its networked and dematerialised circuits, a barometer for reading the contemporary condition, and anticipating potential future forms. In this non-pecuniary sense, contemporary art can be considered an alternative currency that takes a measure of society as it moves.

A singularity of the thesis contribution lies in viewing the different modalities of value and valuation the case studies offer *through* one another (Chapter 6), in the diffraction that Karen Barad's agential realism advocates (2003, emphasis added). Her approach is to foster constructive engagements across disciplinary boundaries, and to stress in these entanglements the interconnected nature of the material world and its discursive practices as mutually implicated. This diffraction is generative: artistic thinking without structural thinking is abstracted; structural thinking without artistic thinking is impoverished.

This process is a bit like the house-build depicted in Figures 73 & 74 above, an aspirational self-built solution in the Cape Town township of Dunoon, established post-apartheid. The new house is being fashioned like a wrapper over an existing government-issued matchbox house, in local parlance. The public and the private are being hybridised. Everyday life is carrying on inside while the inhabitants invent themselves a new future. The house-build is a demonstration of diffraction in the urban fabric and it speaks to the surfacing of links in this thesis between space and imagination. Through diffraction, artistic thinking can help generate new structures to apprehend reality while the enabling technologies of structural thinking can help underwrite imagination. This imbricated relationship, which I have earlier called wishful thinking, can help create new forms. The grounded context inspires specificity of those resolved forms. Indeed: this thesis began with a Brillo-box artwork and now concludes with a match-box house. Andy Warhol's box cued the invisible structures of the artworld while the Dunoon matchbox conversion proposes a reconfiguration, its surprising juxtapositions the bricks and mortar of re-imagined solutions.

In closing, Penny Siopis conceived of her recent large-scale artworks, created in a residency at Cape Town's Maitland Institute, as remnants of performance rather than paintings. On the significance of performance to the world at large, she told a public audience that it was about desire – to have a world that is relational. “Most humans desire that but we often get back into binary positions. You can extrapolate something of that in the process [of making]. We are talking about openness, humaneness and relating. Whether it has an effect one can never say in terms of its measure. But there's a space for free will, play and thinking, where hopes and desire can be part of our thinking” (2017). This desire for a relational world, a desire communicated by the performative process of making, infers an alternative kind of value for the currency, or contemporary relevance, of artistic practice. That desire is surely about art as an aspiration and potential re-imagination of material conditions, through ways of being and new models of living. As we heard earlier, works of art provide new experiential gestalts and, therefore, new coherences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 235). They represent a kind of forward thinking and, in so doing, have a public value beyond measure.

Interviews

All audio recordings in possession of the author, unless otherwise indicated.

Emma Bedford. 24 May 2017. Personal interview. Cape Town central.

Amanda Botha. 3 February 2016. Personal interview. Gardens.

Amanda Botha. 26 May 2017. Personal interview. Oranjezicht. Author's notes.

Eugene Botha. 2 December 2015. Personal interview. New Doornfontein.

Mbongeni Buthelezi. 26 February 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Mbongeni Buthelezi. 25 March 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Mbongeni Buthelezi. 24 April 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Mbongeni Buthelezi. 28 May 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein & Edenvale.

Mbongeni Buthelezi. 4 July 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Mbongeni Buthelezi. 27 February 2015. Personal interview. Maboneng.

Mbongeni Buthelezi. 25 April 2016. Personal interview. Selby. Author's notes.

Dabing Chen. 16 September 2016. Personal interview. Cape Town central.

Svend Christensen. 4 July 2014. Personal interview. Troyeville.

Filip De Boeck. August 2015. Skype interview. South Africa & Belgium.

Gordon Froud. 15 January 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Gordon Froud. 26 February 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Gordon Froud. 24 March 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Gordon Froud. 24 April 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Gordon Froud. 26 May 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Gordon Froud. 2 July 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Gordon Froud. 26 February 2015. Personal interview. City & Suburban.

Gordon Froud. 26 April 2016. Personal interview. City & Suburban. Author's notes.

Gibson Mabutho Khumalo. 26 February 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Gibson Mabutho Khumalo. 12 June 2015. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Alon Kinkel. 11 June 2015. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

David Mayers. 23 July 2016. Telephone interview. Cape Town & Johannesburg.
Author's notes.

Power Mothetho Mazibuko. 25 March 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Power Mothetho Mazibuko. 12 June 2015. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Jacki McInnes. 16 January 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Jacki McInnes. 25 February 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein. Author's notes.

Jacki McInnes. 25 March 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Jacki McInnes. 24 April 2014. Personal interview. City & Suburban.

Jacki McInnes. 25 May 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Jacki McInnes. 2 July 2014. Personal interview. Rosebank.

Jacki McInnes. 24 February 2015. Personal interview. City & Suburban.

Molemo Moiloa. 19 January 2015. Skype interview. Cape Town & Johannesburg.

Adrian Myers. 19 August 2015. Personal interview. Troyeville.

Giles Peppiatt. 24 February 2015. Personal interview. Rondebosch.

Brett Scott. 10 July 2016. Personal interview. Cape Town central.

Daniel Stompie Selibe. 16 January 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Daniel Stompie Selibe. 24 February 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Daniel Stompie Selibe. 25 March 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Daniel Stompie Selibe. 25 April 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Daniel Stompie Selibe. 25 May 2014. Personal interview. Selby.

Daniel Stompie Selibe. 5 July 2014. Personal interview. Selby.

Daniel Stompie Selibe. 27 February 2015. Personal interview. Selby.

Daniel Stompie Selibe. 25 April 2016. Personal interview. Selby. Author's notes.

Herman Steyn. 8 September 2015. Personal interview. Westlake.

Herman Steyn. 2 November 2015. Personal interview. Westlake.

Herman Steyn. 12 January 2016. Personal interview. Westlake.

Herman Steyn. 17 March 2016. Personal interview. Sandton. Author's notes.

Herman Steyn. 7 July 2016. Personal interview. V&A Waterfront.

Herman Steyn & Brett Scott. 21 September 2016. Personal interview. Cape Town central.

Herman Steyn & Brett Scott. 30 November 2016. Personal interview. Mouille Point.

Bié Venter. 24 February 2014. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Bié Venter. 11 June 2015. Personal interview. Kensington.

Diane Victor. 2 December 2015. Personal interview. Doornfontein.

Piet Viljoen. 7 December 2016. Personal interview. Claremont.

Key meetings

Brett Scott. 2 February 2016. Bree Street, Cape Town central.

Scheryn collective. 24 November 2015. Constantia.

Scheryn collective. 14 April 2016. Constantia.

Scheryn collective. 8 June 2016. Constantia.

Scheryn collective. 10 August 2016. Constantia.

Scheryn collective. 3 November 2016. Constantia.

Scheryn collective. 15 February 2017. Constantia.

Scheryn collective. 15 March 2017. Camps Bay.

Scheryn collective. 25 April 2017. Camps Bay.

Scheryn collective. 28 June 2017. Camps Bay

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